

# The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

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TO MY DAUGHTER

MRS. CHARLES DELMÉ RADCLIFFE,  
OF ROME



## PREFACE

THE purpose of this book is to describe the scene of a story of two hundred years ago, the story of the Franceschini, husband and wife, and of the priest who came between them. It is of these three that the tale is told in the wondrous poem of "The Ring and the Book," a poem as brilliant, as pathetic, as lurid and as dolorous as a winter sunset.

Few need to be reminded that the story is true, and that the poet follows the ancient record with as much exactness as the limner of a missal copies a passage of Holy Writ.

It is a tragic story, since of the six chief persons who took part in it four died a violent death, a fifth vanished to distant lands and was heard of no more, while one remained alone to end his days haunted by the face of a dead woman, who, when she lived, had called him "far beyond friend."

The scene of this tale of the Franceschini is laid in the heart of Italy, in that gracious stretch of valley and hill which lies between Florence and Rome. To the traveller, no part of Italy is more familiar, unless it be the country of the lakes or the northern sea beaches. It is with no widely scattered region that the narrative is concerned, but rather with little more than a winding road between two towns, with the towns themselves, with a church or so and certain streets, and with a small

## Preface

posting-inn, where a meagre upper room still rings with the voices of tragedy, for here the husband, wife and priest met, face to face, for the last time.

It may be of service to point these places out, lest some, interested in the story, should pass them by as if they were like other roads, other streets and other churches, or stay to admire an altar-piece without knowing that they stand on the spot where Pompilia was married to her woeful husband, and where her body lay after her troublous life was over. Elsewhere, from utter lack of knowing, we may pass, all unheeding, by the banks of "the crystal dykes at Camelot," ramble over the spot where bloomed the roses of Rosamond's Bower, and watch, with apathy, the holiday folk who trample the English beach first touched by the prows of Cæsar's galleys.

The story covers an unquiet period of four years, the direful part of which fell in the time of mid-winter, while that which was more happy to recall came, like a break of blue sky, in the heyday of spring.

The history of Pompilia has been already briefly told in prose. The sole excuse for repeating it again, and in greater detail, is to bring the actual incidents of the narrative into immediate association with the places of their happening. It can be of small interest to read of Castelnovo if the events that came to pass in the little town are either unfamiliar or indistinct. The field of Waterloo, even with its obtrusive monuments, is no more than a piece of eligible farm land to the uninformed, while no study of the circumstances of the battle can compare in vividness with a reading of the event made on the spot.

## Preface

When all that was needed for the purpose of this book had been done it was impossible to resist the temptation of setting forth, in the gorgeous language of the poem, what Robert Browning himself made of the people of the story. As they appear in the old documents, they are a company of faded folk, distinctive in a way, but with as little human warmth in them as animates a row of costumes hanging in a playhouse cupboard. Browning breathed into these ghostly men and women the breath of life. They do not pretend to exact portraiture, neither was the Perseus of Benvenuto Cellini a portrait, nor Raphael's "Madonna with the Goldfinch." The Pompilia and Caponsacchi of the poem may never have walked the streets of Arezzo, but in some place, and at some time, they must have trod the highway of the world together, must have suffered as did the lonely woman and the man who was "the lover of her life," must have faced their fate with the same untrammelled spirit, and so have added some lustre to the chronicle of human endeavour and devotion.

FREDERICK TREVES.

THATCHED HOUSE LODGE,  
RICHMOND PARK, SURREY,  
*October, 1913.*



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Part One  
THE STORY



# THE COUNTRY OF "THE RING AND THE BOOK"

## I

### THE OLD YELLOW BOOK

A BUNDLE of old legal documents, collected by a lawyer curious in the dry sophistries of his calling, proved to be the unlikely material out of which was fashioned one of the finest, most imaginative, and most human poems of the nineteenth century, a work which has been described as "the most precious and profound spiritual treasure that England has produced since the days of Shakespeare."\*

The lawyer was Monsignore Francesco Cencini of Florence, and the object of his concern was a certain murder trial held at Rome in 1698, in which the principal accused was Count Guido Franceschini of Arezzo. It is evident that the man of law was a friend of the Franceschini. Probably he had had legal dealings with the family, for Arezzo is only fifty-one miles distant from Florence. Moreover, he sent from Florence "proofs on behalf of Count Guido," but they arrived too late, since by the time of their coming the nobleman was merely "Signor Guido of blessed memory." Whatever Cencini's interest may have been, his curiosity in the case was acute, for he persuaded at least three of his legal friends in Rome to send him every possible paper that bore in any way upon the trial.

\* *The Athenæum.*

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In response to his demand, these correspondents forwarded to their "most illustrious and most worshipful Signor and Patron" no fewer than eighteen documents, partly in print, partly in manuscript, heavy with words, swollen with arguments, "instruments," citations and depositions, set out for the most part in the Latin tongue, and with as little coherence as would be found in the clamour of eighteen disputatious persons all speaking at once. These eighteen papers Signor Cencini arranged in such order they were capable of, indexed the whole, and then caused the collection to be bound in vellum with some care.

What happened to the book when the Florentine lawyer died none can tell. It vanished from the view of the world for one hundred and sixty years, lying, it may be, on some forgotten shelf, with none to finger its pages nor read its crabbed print. It may well have spent half a century in a worm-eaten muniment chest, or another fifty years among the cobwebs of a lumber room. Whatever its hiding place or its adventure, it emerged at last into the light of day—into the sunlight, indeed, of an Italian summer—in the year 1860. It was then that Robert Browning found it on an open stall in a market square of Florence, among a jumble of minor relics of abandoned homes and odds and ends of rubbish.

He purchased it for eightpence. It was a curious book for a poet to seize upon, a volume, one would have thought, as little likely to interest him as would an old Italian "Herbal" or a treatise on geometry. Yet out of these records of a criminal court, out of this mass of hard-hammered, bitter, unfeeling stuff, he produced a poem palpitating with life, full of tenderness and passion,



## The Old Yellow Book

where, within a vast fabric of stern wisdom and learned argument, was enshrined the exquisite, small figure of an adorable, pathetic woman.

Such is the "square old yellow book" which figures in the title of the poem. It lies now in safe keeping in the Library of Balliol College, Oxford, a book with "crumpled yellow covers," "small quarto size," just as Browning describes it in his prelude.\*

Two additional documents concerned with the famous case have come to light since Browning found the Yellow Book in 1860. One of these is a contemporary account in manuscript dealing with the general facts of the tragedy and with the execution of the criminals. It was discovered in London by one of Browning's acquaintances, who, knowing the poet's interest in the subject, sent it to him. The MS., which contains many new particulars, was evidently written some years after the story had closed.† The second document, also in manuscript, was discovered in a library in Rome. It shows evidence of having been written at a later period than the pamphlet just referred to. It was published in English by W. Hall Griffin in the *Monthly Review* for November, 1900. Of this document Browning had no knowledge.‡

For years, no doubt, the great murder case was talked about and mused over, its details becoming fainter and

\* The most convenient edition of "The Old Yellow Book" is that edited by Charles W. Hodell, and published as a volume of "Everyman's Library," London.

† It is reproduced in the *Miscellanies* of the Philobiblion Society, 1868-9, and is made free use of in "The Ring and the Book."

‡ Both of these interesting manuscripts are to be found in the appendix of "The Old Yellow Book" in "Everyman's Library."

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fainter in each telling, until it faded into the limbo of mere legend. It may be surmised that for a century or more before Browning's time the whole story had been already blotted out and forgotten. The people who had played their parts in the vivid tragedy had passed into nothingness and had vanished as utterly as if they had never been. As the poet writes :

"What was once seen, grows what is now described,  
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less  
In every fresh transmission ; till it melts,  
Trickles in silent orange or wan grey  
Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark."

Browning brings the tale from out of the dark into the day again, lifts the curtain of the past and shows a brightly illumined stage with a drama in progress, brings the very actors once more to life, and has them act their tragedy, scene by scene, not precisely as the world in Rome witnessed it, but as he would have it presented to the greater world of art, of sentiment and of morality.

The fragments he pieced together to produce this wondrous reconstruction are to be found scattered amongst the bundles of papers in the Yellow Book. These confusing documents circle and flutter within the vortex of a whirlwind of words, words which arise from an arena full of heated combatants. In the midst the lawyers—a stalwart party of four, two on either side—fight like gladiators armed with buckler and sword. Around them crowd their supporters, friends, and half the people of Rome. If one of the four makes a sharp legal thrust with his blade, it is met, with a thud, by the blunt shield of his opponent. Cases, judgments, precedents and rulings, drawn from the whole arsenal of the law, are snatched up and hurled about like missiles.

## The Old Yellow Book

The sentence of a court in ancient Rome is answered by a passage from the Scriptures; while the solemn decision of an august judge is wafted away by a flippancy line of verse from Ovid. The whole battlefield of the Law, extending far back into dim time, is raked over to find stones to throw. The fighters yell, the one against the other, as the missiles fly.

Above the din of the contest there is ever to be heard the same mean tale told over and over again. The words that tell it rise and fall like the notes of a recurrent tune, now pathetic, now horrible, now played in rhythm, now in discord, but ever discernible the while as the one same direful melody. The atmosphere is hissing with abuse, with spiteful denunciations, with partisan praise, with brazen lies and shabby innuendoes, until at last it comes about that, if all that is said be true, on the one side and the other, there is not a soul in the entire company, from the noble lady to the house-boy, who does not emerge from the fray blackened with some degree of infamy—save, perhaps, one only, a genial priest, the easy-going canon, Conti, who died before the great tragedy was played to the end.

Bandied to and fro in the thick of the crowd is the figure of a girl of seventeen, delicate and sweet to look upon. She is now lifted aloft by lusty arms above the heads of the rabble, is now mercilessly trampled underfoot, is now dragged through the dirt like a half-strangled thief, and is now raised high on a sunny pedestal beyond the reach of harm. There is in the crowd, too, the strong figure of a man who stands unmoved in the midst of the squalid riot. It would seem that no assault can shake him, nor can

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

any eddy of violence drag him from his post. It is to him that the girl with the fawn-like eyes holds out her hand, and when the crowd has vanished and all is still, it is by his side that she rests.

The story, so far as it can be made out from the twenty documents and so far as it can be extracted from among the mass of contradictions and discrepancies which they present, is, briefly, as follows.



1.—VIA VITTORIA, ROME.  
To the left are the barred windows of the Ursuline Convent.



## II

### THE COMPARINI FAMILY IN ROME

**I**N the year 1693 there lived, in a quiet street in Rome, a family of the name of Comparini. They were people of the middle class and of comfortable means. The husband, Pietro Comparini, at the time when the story opens, was about sixty-four years of age. He followed no occupation, and it is not known that he had ever adopted any trade or profession. A native of Florence and therefore a foreigner, he appears to have been an indolent, easy-going, "independent gentleman," who graciously left the affairs of his household to the charge of his wife. According to those who wished him ill, he was a spendthrift, and in debt. Indeed, these enemies of his did not shrink from saying that he was so poor as to be in receipt of secret doles from the Papal Charities. There seems to have been but little truth in this, for the last will and testament of Pietro Comparini, completed shortly before he died, shows that he was possessed of quite comfortable means. Other traducers affirmed that he was addicted to vulgar company and the frequenting of taverns. It is a hard saying, but, although there are no grounds upon which to dispute the libel, there were circumstances in his life and times which make it conceivable that he would find his "warmest welcome at an inn."

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The wife, Violante, who was some three years younger than her husband, was a Roman born. She was a masterful woman, with a shrewd eye for business, and a capacity for scheming of a quite exceptional order. Modern cynics would have called her a "managing woman." In domestic strategy she was bold and resourceful, fearless as a lion, quick and crafty as a fox. She was furthermore haughty, and, on occasion, arrogant. Another quality she had, which enabled her to use her special talents with full effect: she was endowed with a preternatural volubility of speech.

The only child was a daughter, Pompilia, who, at the time the narrative begins, was thirteen years old. The sole record, so far, in the life of this little girl is that she was born on July 17th, and baptised on July 23rd, 1680, in the parish church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, on which occasion the curate, one Bartolomeo Mini, bestowed upon her the sonorous title of Francisca Camilla Victoria Angela Pompilia Comparini, a name like the ripple of a brook expressed in words.

Pietro's estate consisted of some realisable property, and of an income derived from certain trust funds, which funds, in the event of his dying without children, would pass into the hands of strangers. This latter detail, although commonplace enough, is noteworthy, because it proved to be the beginning of trouble. Indeed, this item in the covenant of a trust led to tragedy and murder.

The Comparini family lived in the Via Vittoria, a narrow street leading out of the northern end of the Corso.





2.—THE VIA VITTORIA, ROME.  
Showing an Old House of Two Storeys.



3 —ROBERT BROWNING'S HOUSE IN THE  
VIA BOCCA DI LEONE, ROME.



## The Comparini Family in Rome

In the same year of grace 1693, there was to be found in the ancient Tuscan town of Arezzo—some 154 miles north of Rome—certain relics of the noble family of the Franceschini. The house consisted then of the Donna Beatrice Franceschini, a widow of advanced years,\* of her three sons, and one daughter.

The eldest son, Paolo—a man of forty-three—was a priest with the style of *abate*. He resided at Rome, where he held the office of Secretary to Cardinal Lauria. The second son, Girolamo, who was four years younger than this brother, was a priest and a canon of the Church of Santa Maria della Pieve at Arezzo. He lived with his mother in the Franceschini Palace. The third son, Guido, was thirty-five years of age at the time when this story begins. He followed no avocation, and as his other brothers were priests he assumed the title of Count and took his place in the household at Arezzo as the head of the family. The only daughter, Porzia, had already married a member of the distinguished family of Aldobrandini, and had apparently taken her leave of the old city.† The household, therefore, at Arezzo, at the time dealt with, consisted of the widowed countess, the Canon Girolamo, and the Benjamin of the family, the idle Guido.

The reverend brother in Christ, the Abbe Paolo Franceschini, occupies a prominent place in the Old Yellow Book. He moves through the scenes of the

\* She was born in 1631, and would therefore have been sixty-two years old in 1693. She died in 1701.

† Porzia was born in January, 1653, and was thus the second in age in the family. Guido's baptismal entry is January, 1658.

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drama as a dim, unquiet, sinister figure, whose footsteps were a portent of ill. He was a man of parts, a consummate trickster, a Machiavelli of the back streets and a coward to boot. His position in Rome was good. His patron, the Cardinal Lauria, died in November, 1693, whereupon Paolo secured the lucrative post of secretary to the Order of the Knights of St. John of Malta. The headquarters of the Order in Rome were in the Via Condotti, a street very close to the Via Vittoria. The abbe had also a villa, or garden house with a vineyard, near the Ponte Milvio, a little river suburb on the fringe of the Campagna, about two miles distant from the walls of Rome.

Of Canon Girolamo very little is said in the Yellow Book, but that very little—if the facts be true—is very bad. Inasmuch as he lacked the keen intellect of his brother Paolo, his wickedness was somewhat elemental and wanting in finish. As a scoundrel, he never rose above mediocrity, limiting his efforts to listening at doors, to kicking women and to plotting their ruin.

Count Guido Franceschini was a woeful degenerate who combined some of the shrewdness of the epileptic with the domestic attributes of the Bushman. He was a crawling ruffian, meaner than a robber of children and malicious as a wounded snake. His dwarfed brain seems to have been drugged by misery of his own making and to be capable only of devising fresh poisons for the shafts of hatred and revenge. He reduced cruelty to an art, made greed the fetish of his worship and developed to the best of his restricted ability the accomplishment of lying. He does not seem to have possessed any rudimentary virtue except patience, the

## The Comparini Family in Rome

patience of a coward to wait until the back of his victim is turned.

It will not be a matter of surprise that Guido is described in the Yellow Book as presenting "a disposition more gloomy than pleasant." Those who knew him in the life speak of him as a man of low stature, thin and pallid, with a prominent nose, black hair and heavy beard. A less exact observer remembers him as being "ordinary in appearance and of weak temperament." A drawing of Count Franceschini exists which was made on the day of his execution.\* He there appears as a dazed melancholic, such as might be seen lolling aimlessly in the courtyard of a madhouse. The portrait is that of a ruffian, not of the fine, slouch-hatted brigand or pirate type, but rather of a kind that in modern times is discovered by a cook skulking in an area.

This nobleman had found a place, strange to say, in the service of a distinguished prelate, Cardinal Nerli. In what particular manner he assisted the cardinal is not known. By the time, however, that the present narrative commences, he was no longer in this pious household, but was loafing about Rome looking for something to do.

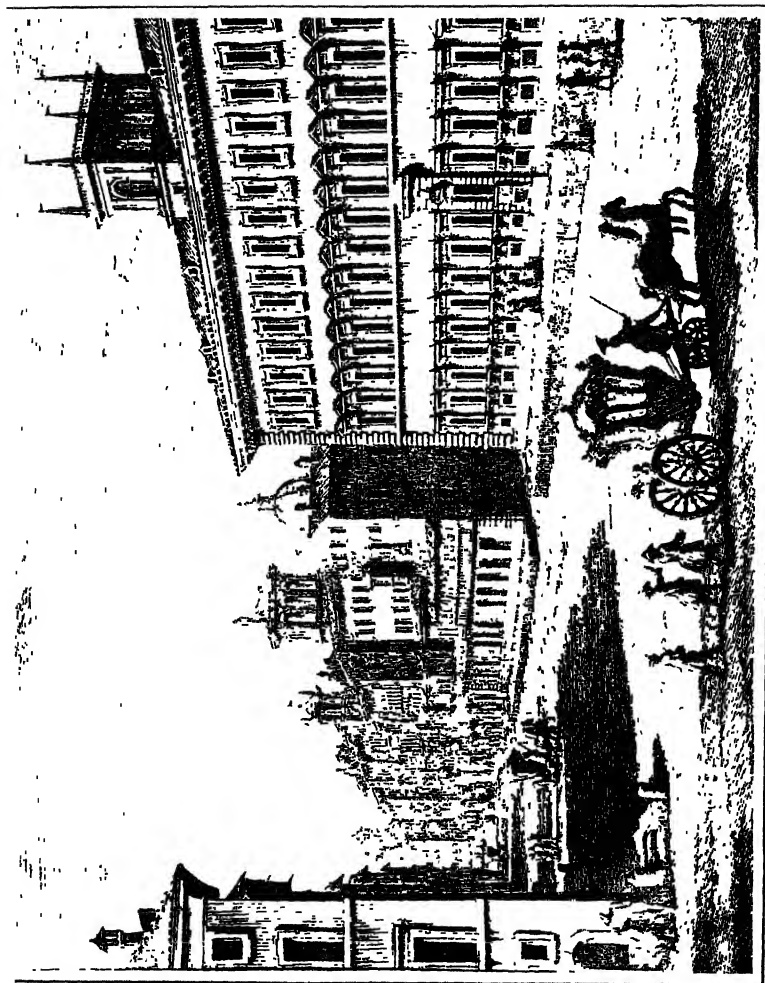
Had the Franceschini been rich they might have flaunted it in Arezzo with the best, for their long lineage gave them a claim to consideration. They might, indeed, have been the great people of the city and have lorded it over both the bishop and the governor. But, unhappily, the Franceschini had fallen

\* This appears in Vol. X. of "The Poetical Works of Robert Browning." London, 1889.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

upon evil times. Although they occupied a palace, they were desperately poor and were indeed driven to straits to live. One can imagine the cavern-like palazzo with its vaulted hall and its solemn stair, a stair so wide as to give the single figure mounting it an aspect of unutterable loneliness. One can fancy its shuddering passages, its echo-haunted suites of empty rooms, where the plaster that had fallen from ceilings, still bright with Venuses and Cupids, made grave-like heaps on the creaking floor; where the light, shot through the gap left by a shutter dropping from its hinge, showed bare walls with dull square patches, whence pictures had been taken, one by one, to fill the empty treasury, with perhaps just one tall portrait left of some arrogant count—alone in the gloom—whose canvas was too mouldy or too frayed to fetch a soldo.

It was fated that Count Guido and Pompilia Comparini should meet. Their coming together was the outcome of no romantic circumstance, but was brought about by a hairdresser—a female hairdresser to boot.



4.—THE CORSO, AS IT WOULD APPEAR IN POMPILIA'S TIME.  
The Palazzo Ruspoli, by S. Lorenzo in Lucina, to the right; the opening of the Via Condotti  
to the left.  
*From an Old Print.*





### III

#### A QUIET WEDDING

**G**UIDO, as has been already said, was mooning about Rome without a copper in his pocket, seeking for something to do. It was natural that his clever elder brother, the prosperous abbe, should take him in hand in order to promote this laudable endeavour. Paolo appears to have come to the opinion that Guido was not destined by Nature for intellectual work, nor indeed for work of any kind. It was evident, therefore, that his best prospect of advancement, his best chance of obtaining comfort in life and money for the wretched house in Arezzo, lay in marrying a lady of wealth. Now a stunted nobleman of gloomy appearance and weak temperament, with an unattractive person, vicious habits and an empty purse, is not a Romeo for every Juliet. Paolo, indeed, had a heavy task before him when he undertook to "do something" for this palefaced, bearded brother of his.

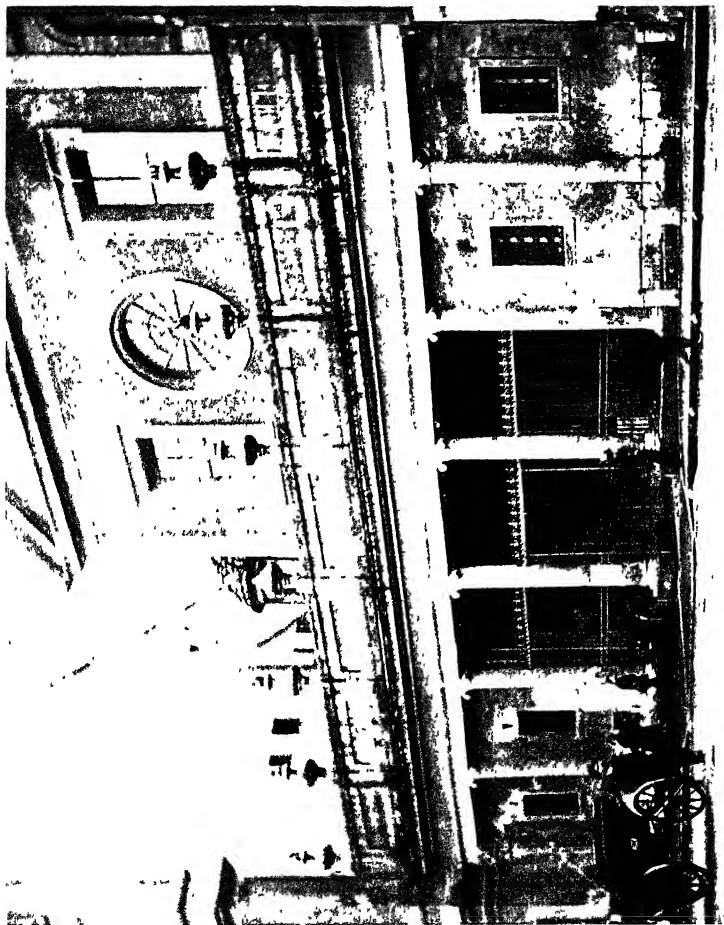
Happily there was in the Piazza Colonna, half-way down the Corso, a hairdresser's shop kept by a woman. Guido found this establishment a convenient loafing place. It was central, it was cool, and much frequented; there would be a bench to sit upon, people to talk to, the deft work of scissors and comb to watch and nothing to pay. On one summer's morning he confided to the hairdresser that he was thinking of

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

entering the holy estate of matrimony. Possibly he spoke of love, of Dante and Beatrice, of two hearts that beat as one, and of such other raptures as his limited invention would permit. Certainly he spoke of Arezzo, and here his talent for lying served him well, for he explained to the coiffeuse, while she was sweeping up hair from the floor, that he had a noble palace in Tuscany with varied possessions and eligible estates, as well as a lineage as ancient as the Barberini. To the description of the amenities of the Franceschini property his brother, the abbe, no doubt added some illuminating details.

It so happened, while this was in progress, that Violante Comparini of the Via Vittoria realised that she had a daughter and that daughters marry, and, being aware that the hairdresser's shop in the Piazza Colonna was a favourable lounging place for gentlemen of quality, she whispered in the hairdresser's ear some pleasant things about Pompilia, and especially about Pompilia's financial prospects. Pompilia, it is true, was only thirteen years of age, but Violante was a woman who looked ahead. As a liar, Violante was no match for the Franceschini brothers, but she did her best and met with quite encouraging success. The hairdresser cannot fail to have been impressed with the amount of wealth laid up in quarters where it would be little suspected, and later in her life, when light fell upon her, she must have often asked with Pilate, "What is truth?"

At an appropriate moment Paolo came forward and arranged with the coiffeuse for an introduction to the Comparini family. He went farther, and promised to the wig-maker the sum of 200 scudi (which is in English



5.—THE CHURCH OF SAN LORENZO IN LUCINA, ROME,  
Where Pompilia was married



## A Quiet Wedding

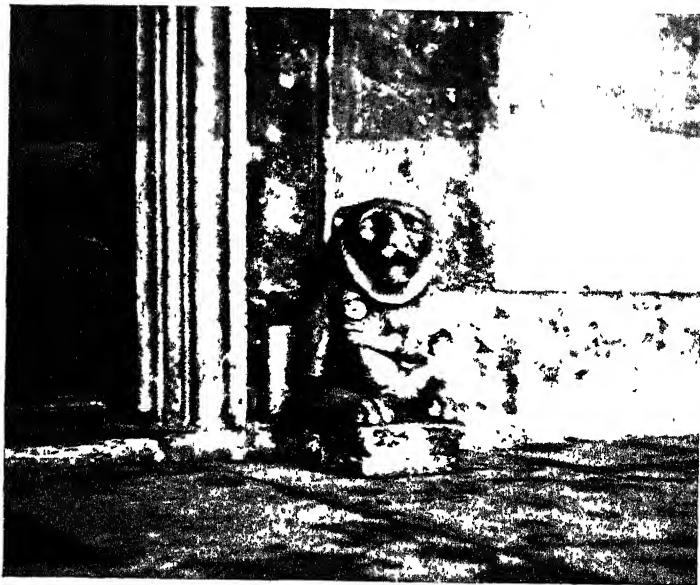
currency £40) on the day that his illustrious brother led Signorina Pompilia to the altar. From such knowledge of the Franceschini family as the Yellow Book affords it would be safe to conclude that this £40 was never paid. No doubt the abbe, when dilating upon the splendours of his house, might have owned, with a sigh, that at one time he had hoped that his younger brother would find a bride among the noble ladies who graced the many palaces of Rome. From such a noble dame, escorted to her carriage by bowing lackeys, it was certainly a deep descent to a slip of a girl of thirteen, living in a back street, and probably at the moment playing in the gutter.

The preliminary interview arranged by the coiffeuse took place no doubt in the best parlour of the house in the Via Vittoria. It was not the count and his prospective father-in-law who met, because, in a matter of this kind, poor Pietro, the frequenter of taverns, counted for nothing. The interview was between Violante and the Abbe Paolo. It must have been an interview of severe interest, this fencing bout in lying between a voluble old lady and a foxy priest, this match with loaded dice between two finished tricksters, both genially unscrupulous and frankly without conscience. The abbe won in the end by sheer weight of lying. Having dwelt at some length upon the high standing of the family at Arezzo, he—confirmed at each point by Guido—proceeded to give details of the purely fictitious estate upon which that honoured family subsisted. His brother's income, the abbe said, in a gush of open-hearted confidence, was £340 per annum. As a matter of fact, Guido's entire capital did not amount to that sum.

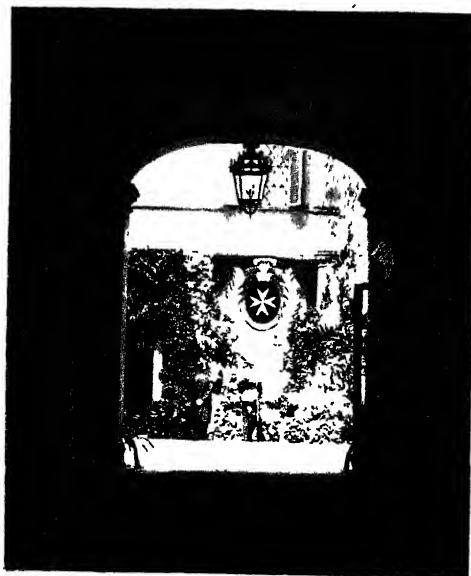
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

At a later stage in the proceedings Pietro appears to have been informed of the happy, and indeed brilliant, future which was in store for his daughter. For some reason, he was not unduly elated. He had probably made inquiry among his tavern gossips, with the result that he was a little dubious as to the financial status of his wife's noble friend. To convince him on this point, Guido produced an exact *schédule* or inventory of his varied possessions, from which it appeared that his income was precisely as stated. The concocting of this fantastic document must have given Paolo and the expectant bridegroom infinite amusement. One can imagine how they chuckled when the abbe added another vineyard or two to the list, and then threw in an ancient castle "let to a careful tenant," together with a mediæval donjon which was profitable as a lime-kiln. It was all very diverting, and no doubt the customers at the hairdresser's must have wondered why the brothers so often nudged one another as they sat together, and then shook with suppressed mirth, and why such a simple expression as "five fine olive groves" convulsed them with laughter. Later on, an examination of the rent rolls, as preserved in the public records of Arezzo, revealed the fact that Count Guido had no settled property of any kind.

The question of Guido's wealth having been satisfactorily disposed of, the next matter discussed by the amiable abbe was the question of the exact dowry that would be bestowed upon Pompilia, who was probably at that moment nursing a doll on the doorstep. Here again Pietro was difficult to deal with, difficult and very obstinate, so obstinate that, although the business was at last completed to the satisfaction of both Violante



6.—THE LION BY THE DOOR OF THE CHURCH OF SAN  
LORENZO IN LUCINA, ROME.



7.—THE COURTYARD OF THE HOUSE  
OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA,  
VIA CONDOTTI, ROME.





## A Quiet Wedding

and Paolo, it was evident that it had needed great pressure to obtain the suspicious man's consent.

The entire property of the Comparini family amounted to £2,400. A portion of this sum was represented by excellent house property, and the rest by certain funds in trust. Pietro at last, after struggling no doubt like a heifer at the door of a slaughter-house, agreed to bestow upon Pompilia an immediate dowry of £520, and to hand over the rest of his possessions to the noble count on condition that the count maintained him and his wife, for the rest of their days, at the ancestral home in Arezzo. To Violante this was an arrangement of great charm. It implied an intimate association with the nobility and gentry, a vicarious elevation to the peerage, life in a palace, great deference and respect when she walked abroad, the enjoyment of exalted and refined society, and, above all, the spectacle of her daughter enthroned as a countess. Pietro probably wondered whether the sum doled out to him by the unconivivial Guido would enable him to assume such a position in the wine shops of Arezzo as his new phase of existence demanded. He evidently moved with caution, because when the secrets of all hearts were laid bare, it became known that of the immediate dowry of £520 Pietro had only paid in actual cash the sum of £140. It also appeared that Guido was so penniless at the time that he was unable to meet the expenses incident to the drawing up of his own marriage settlement, and that these charges had been defrayed by the yielding Pietro.

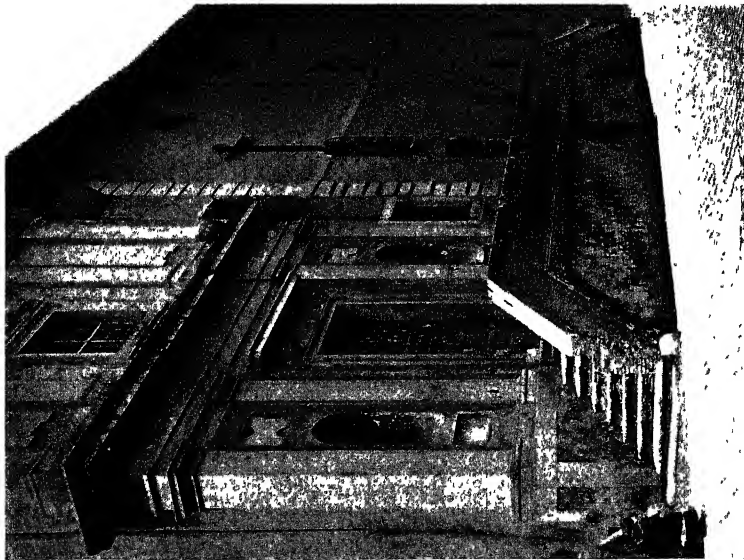
When all the talking and whispering and rustling of papers were over, and when Violante had gloated long

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

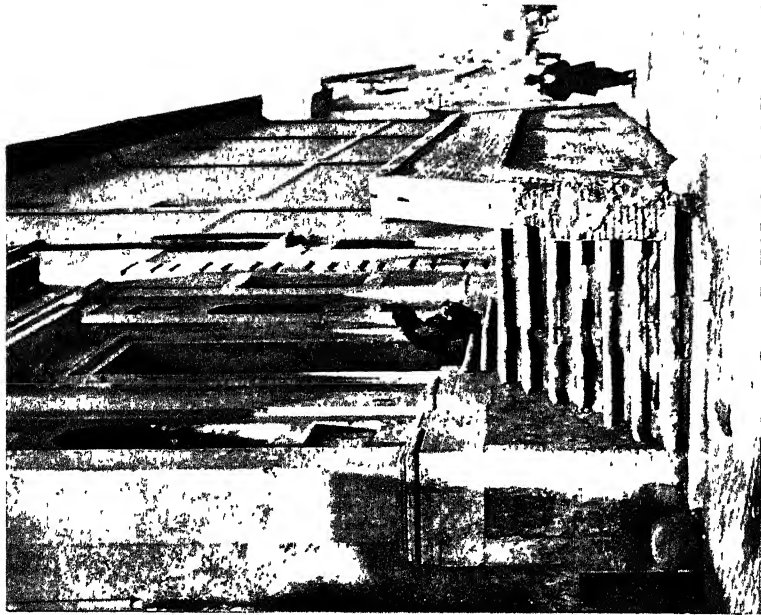
enough over Guido's inventory of the estate and his list of the family jewels, Pompilia, with her face newly washed and her hair freshly "done," was probably called into the parlour and presented to her future husband—the gloomy man with a hooked nose and a black beard—who would interest her as little as a hyæna would interest a kitten.

The wedding took place in the parish church of San Lorenzo in Lucina. According to the former of the two manuscripts, discovered after Browning chanced upon the Yellow Book, Pompilia was "secretly married during December, 1693." No part of this statement is correct, for the marriage did not take place in secret nor was it in the month of December. There has been, up to the present, no definite pronouncement as to the exact date of the ceremony. Browning, following the passage just quoted from the manuscript, makes the marriage (with great artistic effect) take place clandestinely and within shut doors, "one dim end of a December day." It was kept secret, the poem says, from Pietro, while the ceremony itself was performed by Guido's brother the abbe. According to the second of the two manuscripts (the one Browning never saw) the ceremony was performed, without the knowledge of the father and without notice, some time in the month of December. Mr. Charles W. Hodell, in his commentary on the Yellow Book, states that the marriage took place in December, but against the day of the month he puts a note of interrogation. Mr. Hall Griffin, in the appendix to his "Life of Robert Browning,"\* writes: "The real date of the marriage is

\* London, 1910, p. 271.



8.—LE SCALETTE, ROME.  
The Convent in which Pompilia was confined.



9.—THE TRAMP ON THE STEPS OF THE  
CONVENT OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.



## A Quiet Wedding

August or September, 1693." This is the nearest to the truth.

I have had the opportunity of seeing the original entry in the marriage register of the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, and have obtained an official certified copy of the same. This is reproduced at the end of this volume. It will be seen from the entry that the marriage was celebrated on September 6th, 1693 (the day was a Sunday). It will further be seen that it was carried out with every proper observance and formality, so that in no way could it have been described as secret or clandestine. The ceremony was performed not by the Abate Paolo, but by the curate of the church. The banns were announced on three preceding Sundays in July, viz.: July 5th, 12th and 19th, and therefore some two months before the actual marriage took place. It is stated further in the entry that no legitimate impediment to the union was offered. As the church is close to the Via Vittoria and was the parish church of the Comparini, it is inconceivable that Pompilia could have been married without the knowledge of her father. It is significant that in the legal pleadings set forth at the trial of Count Guido no mention is made by either side of a secret marriage.

Had the wedding been effected clandestinely it is safe to assume that the counsel for the defence would have made use of the fact to show how the simple count had been trapped by his nefarious mother-in-law. The long interval that had elapsed between the publication of the banns and the marriage ceremony certainly suggests that there was some hitch in the arrangements or that the announcement was premature.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

As to the precise ages of the "happy couple" it will be observed that Guido was thirty-five and Pompilia thirteen years and two months.

It was a quiet wedding. The bride and bridegroom parted at the church door. Guido probably strolled down to the hairdresser's shop to tell the news. Violante and Pompilia would walk home by way of the Corso, Violante flushed, puffed up and very garrulous, Pompilia silent and full of wonder, yet possibly occupied by the hope that some boy or girl she knew would see her go by in her new frock.

There then followed an interval of great peace that lasted for three uneventful months. Guido went back to Arezzo to set his house in order and to prepare for the reception of his bride and her parents. He would have his days fully occupied, clearing away the dust of years, dragging old furniture out of forgotten places, stuffing up rat holes and adjusting scraps of tapestry over the worst breaches in the walls.

As for her ladyship, she no doubt returned to her dolls. One may believe that, in the quiet of her room, she would place these puppets in a row, would show them the gold ring on her finger, would tell them of the strange doings at the church, and of the ugly old man with a hooked nose who had frightened her with his horrid eyes. There is every reason to suppose that on the day after her wedding the Countess Francesca Pompilia Franceschini resumed her games in the street with her children friends.

## IV

### PALACE LIFE AT AREZZO

**I**N December, 1693, Pompilia and her parents, with their miscellaneous belongings, moved to Arezzo. It was an ill time to travel, for December is often bleak and melancholy, while the roads about that season are, as I learned to my cost, at their worst. The old couple left the Via Vittoria with the belief that they would never see Rome again, but that they would end their days in the Tuscan city, in the peaceful atmosphere of a palace and in the company of their daughter and her children.

They had not been long in Arezzo before trouble began. We are told from one source that Violante was arrogant, violent, and generally offensive, that she endeavoured to possess herself of the domestic keys and to oust the dowager countess from her position as chatelaine of the palace. From the glimpses the Yellow Book affords of Signora Comparini in various walks of life, it is conceivable that there was truth in this information. Moreover, it was further said that Pietro showed an aversion to the company and conversation of people of refinement, and "began to frequent daily all the taverns of the town." The Comparini had made early complaint that they were "denied their old free life," and in this lamentation the voice of Pietro is assuredly to be heard.

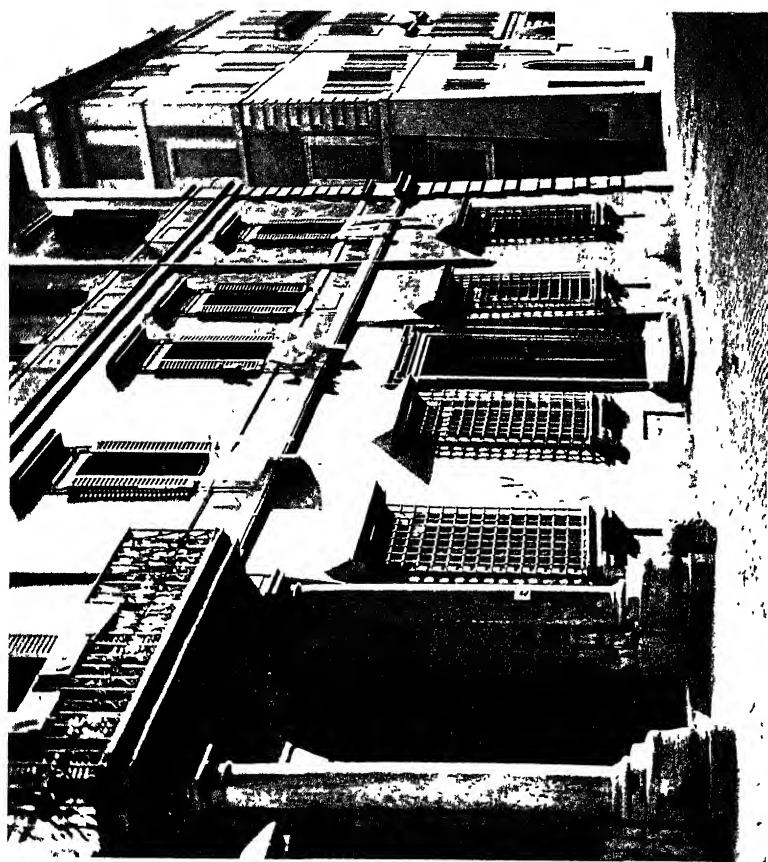
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

As a counterblast to the charge of arrogance and the seizure of the keys, the Comparini protested that they had been so basely deceived that their finer natures had received a shock, and, furthermore, that they had, in general terms, been hoaxed, trapped and robbed. The house thus became "a perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint." It may be taken as certain that Violante, with that fluency of speech with which she was endowed, declared that neither she nor her beloved husband would "stand it." She asserted, and no doubt with considerable power of voice, that the Palazzo Franceschini was a whited sepulchre, a palace of penury, as empty as a cavern and as cheerless.

There were constant squabbles and brawls, altercations that ended in the slamming of doors, and disputes that were concluded by the throwing of things out of window. Moreover, the members of this distinguished family on occasion struck one another. A maid-servant who had displayed a partisan spirit was kicked at least twice, while neighbours had heard, through open windows, the sound of a slap on the face, followed by a like sound extracted apparently from another face.

It was left to one, Angelica Battista, aged thirty-five, fully to illumine the Franceschini *ménage*. She laid open the entire palace, from attic to cellar, as if it had been a doll's house with a hinged front that could be operated like the door of a cupboard. Angelica was once a domestic servant in the Franceschini employ. As she had been dismissed with abruptness and ignominy, and had been both struck and kicked by her master and





10.—THE VIA GIULIA, ROME.



## Palace Life at Arezzo

mistress at the moment of her departure, she may have been prejudiced against the family.

She testified, when the occasion came, that the Franceschini had treated their visitors not only with rudeness but with brutality. Guido had called his mother-in-law a "slut"; Signora Beatrice had warned Angelica against the Comparini and had commanded her to render them no service. Once when Violante was ill, and "needed to be unlaced" and to have vinegar and other restoratives given her, Angelica was forbidden to afford her any assistance, although the poor lady was very cold and, indeed, "nearly dead." Moreover, she was forbidden to light poor Pietro up the stairs when he returned to the palace late at night. This was a cruel injunction, because a wide staircase that flits abruptly to the right and the left in the black abyss of an unfamiliar house is a very puzzling object to a frequenter of taverns who is on his way to bed. Once, indeed, Pietro, in stumbling blindly up these stairs when alone, fell down and was so bruised that he was confined for some days to his room. On another occasion, Pietro, on his return to the Palazzo Franceschini in the evening, found the front door locked, whereupon, to his continued knocking, Violante, in her nightdress, shaking and mumbling, had to shuffle down and let him in.

Of the poverty of the house and of the miserly meanness with which it was conducted, Angelica Battista gives a very luminous picture in her depositions. We see Guido on a cold Saturday morning sending Joseph, the house-boy, out to buy two pounds of beef and waiting at the door to take the meat from him as he returned. This beef he would hand to his mother, and her ladyship

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

would cook it herself, so that there could be no pilfering, for the two pounds of steak had to last the family a week. We can see this same house-boy sniggering at the lamb's head which was served up, in sections, as a relish no fewer than three successive times. We can picture the dowager countess creeping into the sombre dining-room on tiptoe, just before a meal, in order to add water to the one flask of wine which was to serve the family for dinner. We can see poor old Signor Comparini trying patiently to eat his helping of beef, but compelled to abandon the attempt on account of the extreme toughness of the same. On such occasions, Angelica says, he supported life upon a little toasted bread, in bad condition, and a morsel of cheese. This observant woman concludes her criticism of the cuisinier by giving the menu for dinner on a fast day. On such occasion it consisted of but three courses, viz.: vegetable soup, a little salted pike, and some boiled chestnuts.

Some of Angelica's descriptions, although vivid and even dramatic, are possibly a little overdrawn. Thus we are presented with the spectacle of Signora Violante, an aged, grey-haired lady, fleeing, with many a gasp for breath, along the passage leading to her room, pursued by a reverend canon of the Church, Girolamo Franceschini to wit, brandishing a naked sword.

It is not to be supposed that a household endowed with so many domestic abnormalities, and productive of such alarms and incidents, could long remain whole and undivided. When March came, although only three months had elapsed since the Comparini had entered the portals of the palace, they shook the dust of Arezzo from their feet and returned to Rome. It is significant

## Palace Life at Arezzo

that they took Angelica with them. In such straits were they when they left that they were compelled to apply to Guido for money to defray the expenses of the return journey. The Count, one may be sure, never paid money with greater pleasure, while it might be further surmised that he took pains to inform Pietro of that fact. Violante's farewell remarks to Guido and his mother have not been preserved, and by so much the Italian language, although possessing great range of expression, is left the poorer.

The disillusioned couple returned to their old house in the Via Vittoria, saddened and chastened, no doubt, but yet provided with a wider experience of life and something to think about.

Guido must have been jubilant. The Franceschini brothers had been victorious all along the line. The noble Count possessed the dainty Pompilia; he had secured Pietro's money, or the better part of it; he was rid of the burden of lodging and supporting two people he loathed; and, above all, he had seen the last of that horrible virago, Violante, and her wine-bibbing husband. Time showed, however, that he had neither seen the last nor heard the last of Violante Comparini.

## V

### VIOLANTE'S CONFESSION

POMPILIA'S plight after her parents had fled to Rome was lamentable beyond words. Here was a girl not yet fourteen left alone in a sepulchre of a house, in a foreign country, without a single friend. Guido, on the other hand, was as nearly happy as he had ever been in his life. His clever plot had succeeded, his lying had met with the most gratifying results, he had trampled the Comparini into the dirt; while as for his passion of hate, could he not glut it to the full upon this shrinking, pale-faced girl who was always crying for her mother and imploring to be sent home?

The noble Count would be at pains to recall, day by day at dinner, the picture of the two old people—Violante and Pietro—sneaking along towards Rome, and would speculate as to what town they had reached each night, for the journey then occupied a week. Later he would surmise that they had gained the city, and had crawled into the familiar house in the Via Vittoria, whipped and beaten. There they would hide their shame, together with the failure of all their schemes and the utter collapse of their fortunes.

For some few weeks there was comparative peace in the palace, just as after a storm may follow a windless if dreary calm. No news came from Arezzo, for the Countess Pompilia Franceschini could not write, while



11.—VIA GIULIA AND CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA MORTE, ROME.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

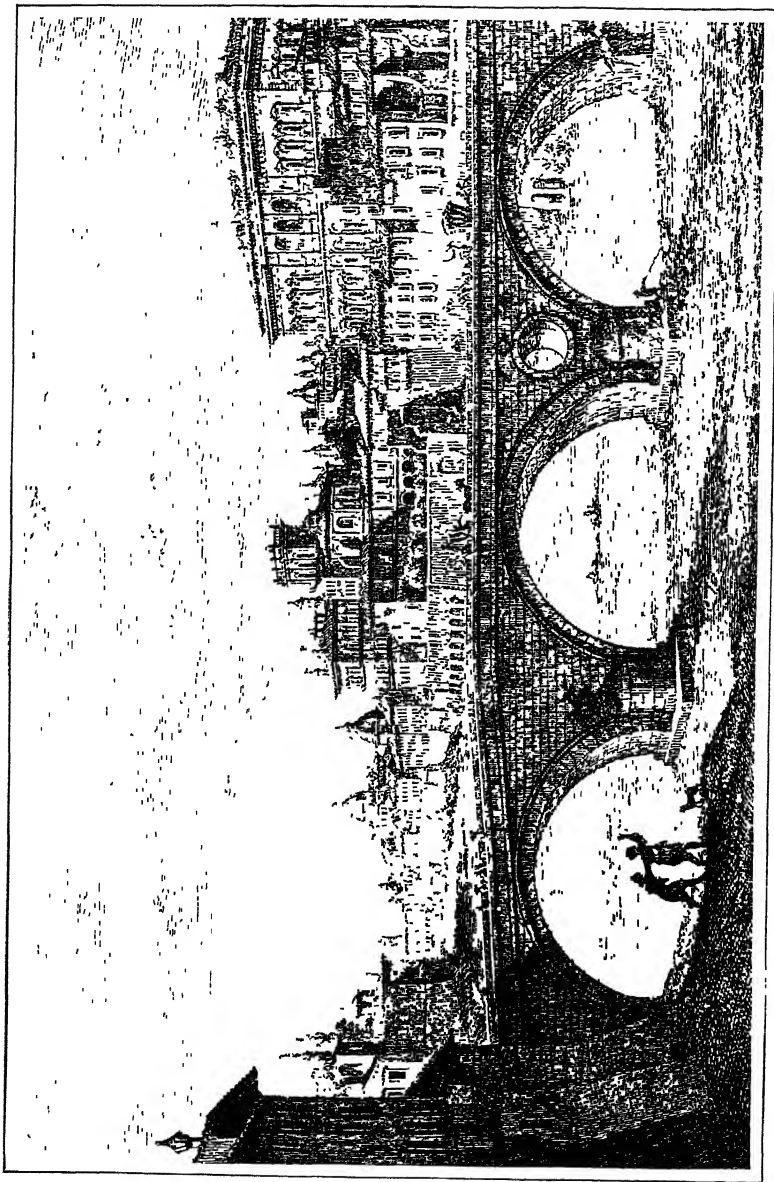
weighed more with her than the joys of a fictitious motherhood. Every item in her story was capable of proof, for all those who had taken part in the solemn farce thirteen years ago were alive and more than eager to state what they knew.

It had been Violante's intention to carry the secret hidden in her heart to the grave. She had made confession now in order to revenge herself upon Guido, because it was evident that the dowry which had been bestowed upon a daughter could not belong to Pompilia Franceschini, who was a daughter no more. It was not until this stage in the story was reached that Pietro's face relaxed, that his indignation faded, and that he was able to smile and compliment his wife upon her ingenious brain.

Thus it came about that Guido's short period of happiness was brought to an end by the dropping of a bomb into his house in the form of the writ of a legal action against him for the recovery of the whole of his wife's dowry. One can conceive how he foamed and shrieked with rage, how he half narcotised Pompilia with the feter of his abuse, how he would drag her to the window by the ear to look at her face, and then, with the hiss of a cobra, would ask her if she knew what she was and what her mother had been. One can imagine, also, how the chaste Beatrice would draw her skirts aside in passing, lest she should be polluted by a creature so infamous; while the Canon Girolamo, who had terrified the child by his disgusting advances, would now sneer at the modesty she had had the impudence to assume.

The action for the nullification of the dowry contract





- 12.—THE RIVER SIDE OF THE VIA GIULIA, ROME.
2. Palazzo Farnese.      3. S. Maria della Morte.      4. S. Giovanni de' Fiorentini.  
7. The New Prisons in the Via Giulia.

*From an Old Print.*



## Violante's Confession

came before the Court at Rome in the summer of 1694. The trial involved an unusual problem and thus excited an exceptional interest. In this and in subsequent legal proceedings the Abbe Paolo acted on behalf of his brother, who remained at Arezzo. The decision was given in Guido's favour. It was proved that Pompilia was not a daughter of the Comparini. It was ruled that the contract between the count and Pietro had been made in good faith and must therefore stand. Pompilia remained in quasi-possession of her daughtership, so that the immediate dowry of £520 bestowed upon her was undisturbed, while as regards the reversionary property it was obvious that that could not come into her possession as she was not legitimately an heir to the same.

So far as money was concerned Guido was no gainer by the trial. Signor Comparini appealed against the decision of the Court, and, pending the hearing of that appeal, no action with regard to the disposal of the dowry could be taken. For reasons which will appear, this second action never came to a hearing. Pietro had paid only £140 out of the amount of £520 which was due, and further to protect himself against any seizure of his funds he entered a statement—a little idea of his wife's, no doubt—that certain creditors had made a claim upon his property.

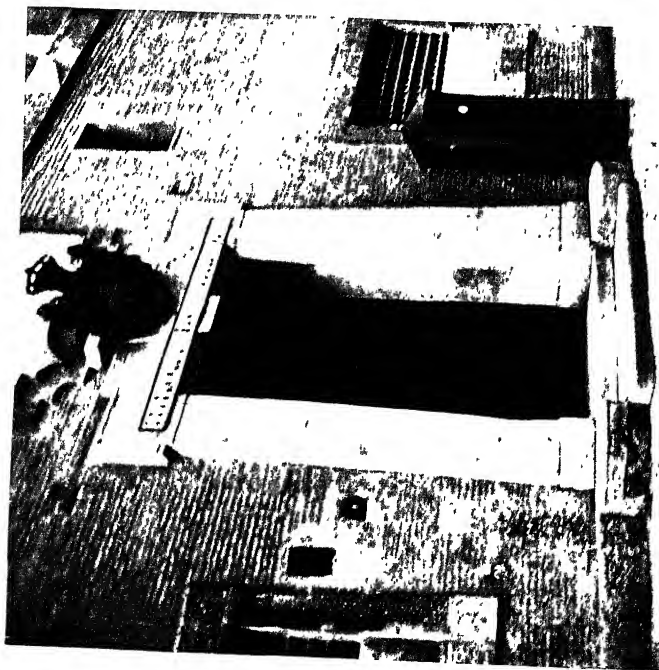
Up to this point Violante had done well, but in the finer art of bull-baiting she was destined to do better. To support their case at the trial, the Comparini published, in the form of a pamphlet, the sworn affidavit of Angelica Battista dealing with the intimate and inner life of the Franceschini household. There is not the least

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

doubt that Violante supplied her now spurious son-in-law with a copy of this incisive document, and, furthermore, she may be depended upon to have furnished reprints of Angelica's memoirs to such notables in Arezzo as were intimate with the Franceschini family. The brochure must have afforded excellent reading for many in that quiet town, since as material for gossip the details relating to the piece of beef, the lamb's head and the watering of the wine were absolutely beyond price. It was Angelica's script that converted Guido from a mere wolfish ruffian into a distempered fiend, as will in time be made manifest.

The wretched Guido could make no reply. In a tottering attempt to be equal with Violante he stated that the Comparini, before they left Arezzo, had urged Pompilia at once to kill her husband, to poison his mother and the reverend canon, to set fire to the house, and then to fly to Rome with the first young black-guard she could happen on. This motherly advice, which would have involved very strenuous proceedings on the part of a mere child of thirteen, was recognised as the product of Guido's spiteful brain, and was only of interest as evidence that his invention was at fault.

Still sillier than the matter of the charge was the manner in which the poor degenerate brought it forward. He produced a letter which the Abbe Paolo had received from Pompilia, the same being duly signed by her and dated "Arezzo, June 14th, 1694." Now it would be about June that the action to set aside the dowry contract was instituted. As this letter rose into unmerited prominence some few years after-



13 & 14 —THE NEW PRISONS IN THE VIA GIULIA, ROME,  
In which Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and Count Guido were confined.



## Violante's Confession

wards, it may be well to dispose of it at this point. The epistle opens as follows:

"Dearest Brother-in-law:

"I wish by this letter to pay my respects to you, and to thank you for your efforts in placing me in this home, where, far removed from my parents, I live now a tranquil life and enjoy perfect safety, not having them around me. For they grieved me night and day with their perverse commands, which were against the law, both human and divine."

Then comes the detailed advice given by Violante on the subject of wholesale murder, arson and dishonour, followed by these sentences:

"Now that I have not her at hand who stirred up my mind, I enjoy the quiet of Paradise, and know that my parents were thus directing me to a precipice, because of their own rage.

"I wish to be a good Christian and a good wife to Signor Guido, who has many times chidden me in a loving manner."

The letter concludes

"Your most affectionate servant and sister,  
FRANCESCA FRANCESCHINI."

Unfortunately the value of this document, as a piece of evidence, was marred by the fact that Pompilia could not at this date either read or write. The terms of the letter were in themselves ridiculous, for it was never suggested that Pompilia was a mistress of the art of sarcasm.

The description of the villainous house at Arezzo as "a quiet Paradise" is extravagant even for the most flippant cynic. Pompilia always regarded the Comparini as her parents, always spoke of them as her "dear Father and Mother," turned to them in her direst trouble and clung to them with the deepest affection

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

to the end. They were indeed the only friends she had in the world. Moreover, when the time came, Pompilia testified that her husband had put before her a letter in pencil, the words of which he had made her trace over with ink with her own hand. When she was shown the letter Paolo produced she said she believed it to be the one she had dealt with in this manner and remembered that she had been told that it was intended for her brother-in-law in Rome.

The obliging Paolo brought forward another letter of like origin that he had received from Pompilia, in which she says that she is well and happy, now that her parents are no longer with her to stir her to evil. In the great criminal trial in Rome these two preposterous documents told heavily against the count.



## VI

### POMPILIA AT BAY

**G**UIDO, wellnigh deranged by the action of the Comparini, had no other joy or relief than to vent the torrent of his wrath upon the shoulders of his lonely and forsaken wife. His hatred of the child seems to have been little less than a demoniacal possession. Everything he saw around him was blood red. He longed to murder Pompilia, to stab her with a score of wounds, slowly to poison her, or to beat her to death. This desire of his heart seems to have been the prevailing topic of his speech when he deigned to converse with her. Being the most squeamish of cowards he was afraid to slaughter her outright without a legal excuse. He cheered himself with the hope that he might so bully and torture her that she would sicken and die, or that she would batter herself to death against the bars of her cage, or would seek peace by leaping from the palace roof on to the kindly stones of the street below.

Guido found, however, that this fragile little maid was hard to kill, and that her courage was even greater than his cowardice. Her brother-in-law, the Canon Girolamo, made use of her distress to promote his dishonourable advances, while the old mother took savage delight in playing with her misery as a cat plays with a benumbed mouse that is still wet from its maw.

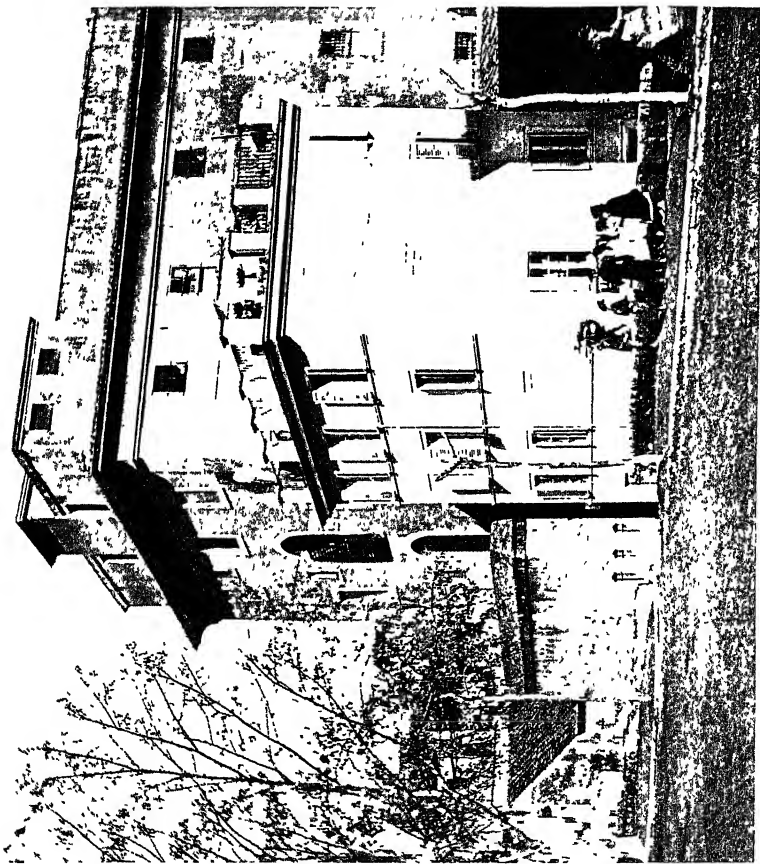
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Pompilia, driven hither and thither in this hell-like cavern of a house, fled in despair to the governor of Arezzo and threw herself at his feet. The governor, however, was a friend of the Franceschini. He rebuked the baby of a wife, charged her with creating a scandal, told her to mend her ways, go home and behave better. This is the man whose remedy for Pompilia's wrong was, as the poem says—

"A shrug o' the shoulder, a facetious word  
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits,  
To Guido in the doorway."

His regard for Guido carried him a little farther, and took him indeed too far, for he wrote (after a hint, no doubt) to the ever-mischiefful Paolo a letter, in which he says that his brothers at Arezzo possessed the "patience of martyrs," that the "poor child," as he fitly calls her, had been led into excesses by her parents, and that she now detests even the memory of their existence. He concluded, in a fine outburst of imagery, by describing the home at Arezzo as "an utter quietude," and in signing his name, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici, wrote himself down as one of the most ready and light-hearted of the many liars with whose utterances the Yellow Book is concerned.

Pompilia then sought the bishop of the city, and, indeed, ran to him twice for pity and protection, begging him to send her to a convent. This prelate seems to have adopted the bland attitude of a stage father, to have patted her on the shoulder, and told her, with many flatulent platitudes, to go home and be a good wife. He seems to have been kind to her, in an oily way, for he "sent her home in his carriage," after he



15.—THE BACK OF THE NEW PRISONS IN THE VIA GIULIA, ROME,  
Showing the condemned cells on the roof.



## Pompilia at Bay

had, no doubt, wiped her wet cheeks, quieted her sobbing, and tidied her hair under her wimple. In spite of all this, Pompilia says in her deposition that "this did no good."

Pompilia's third and final visit to the bishop is graphically described by one Bartholomeo Albergotti, a gentleman of Arezzo, in a communication to Signor Comparini. He writes that on the morning of the day before Palm Sunday the countess went to the church to hear the preaching. It would seem that the quiet of the place, the atmosphere of peace that filled it, together with the drowsy scent of incense and the chanting of the choir, presented so intense a contrast with the devil-haunted house to which she must return that when the service was over she suddenly darted away and rushed into the palace of the bishop.

The bishop declined to give her audience; whereupon she took up her place at the head of the stairs, crouching down in the corner with her heaving shoulders against the door. To avoid a scandal, both Count Guido and Signora Beatrice went to her and begged her to come home. She neither spoke nor moved. They dared not lay hands on her and drag her away, so they parleyed with her at a distance. There was such a look of desperation on her face, such a look of the hunted animal in her solemn eyes, that they stood back in awe. Pompilia, huddled against the door at the head of the stairs, was like a fawn at bay. There she remained the whole day through, dumb and motionless, the picture of despair. At last, as night was setting in and as the Christian bishop was still unmoved, a secretary came out, talked kindly to her, as a passer-by

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

would solace a stray dog that had been chased about until it dropped. He persuaded her in the end to return home, having already urged the malignant Guido not to scold her. It is of this bishop that the Pope asks later on :

"While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach,  
Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?"

It was a month after this, she says in her deposition, that she went to her confessor, an Augustinian priest named Romano, and, telling him all her distresses, implored him to write to her parents and beg their help in her desperate plight. The holy father, no doubt, promised to write, but on reflection thought that he had better not meddle between husband and wife, and so fulfilled his priestly office by doing nothing. Thus it is that Pompilia, in speaking of this letter upon which her last hope hung, says sadly, "But I had no response."

After his first black wrath was satiated a light dawned upon the muddy waste of Guido's brain, and showed him that Pompilia's death, although pleasant to contemplate, would avail him less than he hoped. The appeal in the action about the dowry was pending, and he asked himself, Would her death just now make his position better? He concluded it would make it worse. But happily there was another way. This wife he loathed was young and good looking. He would force her into the arms of some young lover, set a trap for her, catch her in a compromising position, and then throw her out into the streets as a base outcast and an unfaithful wife. This plan, no doubt, pleased him, so that he gloated over it, rubbing his hands and smacking



## Pompilia at Bay

his knee with genial satisfaction. It would make his case very strong when next he met the Comparini in court. The first need obviously was to find the lover, and in this worthy search he was favoured by fortune.

Connected with the Church of Santa Maria della Pieve were two canons who were great friends—Canon Conti and Canon Caponsacchi. Conti was related to the Franceschini, for his brother had married Guido's only sister Porzia. Conti was an amiable, easy-going priest, a peacemaker, a friend to everybody, and a man with an eye to the joys and gaieties of the world. It seems to have been an object in his life to avoid trouble. Caponsacchi was a young man of noble birth and of considerable culture, a favourite in Arezzo society and, according to the testimony of some, a squire of dames. He was a man of spirit, moreover, bold and courageous, and one who was not easily turned aside from any path he had elected to tread.

One evening Pompilia and her woeful husband went to the theatre. The place was very crowded. Near them were sitting Canon Conti and his friend, Giuseppe Caponsacchi. The good-natured Conti, in the hope of bringing a smile to the sorrowful face of the young wife, threw some confetti into her lap. Guido saw the act, and declared at once that it was Caponsacchi who threw them. It was thus, so one reads, that Pompilia and Caponsacchi met for the first time, face to face. Guido had found the decoy.

This episode in the playhouse would be probably towards the end of 1696, when Pompilia was a little over sixteen and Caponsacchi was about twenty-three. Some two and a half years had elapsed since the Comparini had



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

fled from Arezzo, and during the whole of this time the young bride had certainly little relief from unhappiness.

Guido now set to work with a good heart to drive his wife to desperation and disgrace. Letters were sent to Caponsacchi purporting to come from Pompilia. As Pompilia was unable to write, there is little doubt that these letters were composed by Guido and written under his direction. Answers to these letters, stated to have been penned by Caponsacchi, were brought to Pompilia, but as she could not read she could not appreciate them. These also were—the evidence suggests—examples of Count Guido's literary efforts. The documents, as will be told later on, played a prominent part in the great trial at Rome. At this period there was a maidservant in the house with the pretty name of Maria Margherita Contenti. She had succeeded that Angelica whose vivid impressions of the inner life of the Franceschini had so disturbed her late master. Maria Contenti was under Guido's thumb. She was—as was subsequently shown—a woman of the lowest character. She pretended to be the medium of communication between her young mistress and the priest. It was she who manipulated the spurious *billets doux*. It was she who brought fictitious messages of love from the priest, whom she never saw, to the victim whom she was bribed to entrap.

In the meantime Guido assumed the pose of the jealous and injured husband. He railed against Caponsacchi as the destroyer of his peace, as the serpent that had crept into his happy home. He accused Pompilia of encouraging the canon, and so tormented her by continual outbursts of simulated jealousy that she was "reduced," as she says, "to desperation."



17.—THE VIA DEL GOVERNO VECCHIO, ROME.



## Pompilia at Bay

One day, as Caponsacchi was passing the house, she leaned from the balcony and begged him not to pass that way, because she had suffered so much from her husband on his account. Caponsacchi, who knew nothing of the letters and had no inkling of the plot, replied, with a defiant laugh, that no Guido should stop him from passing along the street if he wished, and by that way he would go whenever he was so minded. In answer to this defiance Guido became the more persistent in his cruelty, and threatened many times to kill his victim, assuring her that her evil conduct justified him in doing so.

The story now comes to the beginning of April, 1697, at which time Pompilia realised that she was about to become a mother. She was then nearly seventeen. For her own life, for her own safety, for her own comfort, she had little care. For over three years she had dragged through a life of wretchedness, under the daily menace of death. This she had borne, but she would not allow the life of her child to be sacrificed. This new life was in her keeping, and she resolved to protect and shield it at all costs. It was then, she says, that "I planned to run away and go back to Rome to my father and mother."

She appealed to the generous Canon Conti to help her to escape, and indeed to take her with him to Rome. He explained that he was compelled to decline, owing to his relationship to the Franceschini and the fact that they trusted him as a friend. Conti suggested in his place a certain Signor Gregorio Guillichini. This gentleman readily consented to undertake the mission, but unfortunately before his plans could be matured he

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

was seized with illness and could do nothing. It was then that he and Canon Conti suggested Caponsacchi as the man to rescue her and take her away to the safe keeping of her parents. Caponsacchi, it was said, was about to journey to Rome on business of his own. He was moreover "a man of powerful strength, fearless and full of spirit." Pompilia on her part had "heard it said that he was a resolute man."

So one day as the sturdy canon passed the house she called to him, told him of her dire peril, and begged him to take her to her parents in Rome. Caponsacchi at once replied that he, as a priest, could ill meddle with a matter of this kind, for if he did so it would be an act that the Church and the whole city would condemn. "But," says Pompilia, "I implored him so much and told him that it was the duty of a Christian to free from death a poor foreign woman" that he put aside his scruples and promised to aid her to escape. He told her he would secure a carriage and horses, and when all the arrangements for the journey were complete he would give her a signal by dropping a handkerchief as he passed along the street.

For two whole days, from dawn to sunset, Pompilia, breathless with expectation, watched at the window during every moment that she was free. Guido took care that she lacked no opportunity, for it seemed to him that the snare was ready and the teeth of the trap were on edge to fall. See her, then, in the gloomy room that she loathed as a prisoner loathes his cell, looking out from behind the shutter at a little strip of sunlit street, with her heart in such concern that the pressure of her hand failed to still it. There is the

## Pompilia at Bay

sound of footsteps in the lane; she bends to look out until the sun falls on her shapely head. A priest is passing by, he walks slowly with his face turned to the ground, as if he were lost in thought. His hands are clasped behind his back and in one hand is a handkerchief. As he passes the window the handkerchief drops.

## VII

### THE FLIGHT WITH THE PRIEST

ON the night of the last Sunday in April in the year 1697 Pompilia left her husband's house for ever. She crept down the stairs without awakening the household, a white-faced, hooded figure, tense with terror. She drew back the bolts of the great door, moved it on its reluctant hinges, and through the gap slipped out into the street, free for the first time since she had put her foot within the accursed city. Caponsacchi was there in lay dress in the shadow of the wall. He came forward to meet her, and with the touch of his hand her sense of horror and of loneliness vanished. She had with her a little money and a bundle of clothing such as she could carry in her arms, together with a few simple trinkets in a box. She had her money tied up in the corner of a handkerchief, after the manner of children.

The two walked together through the silent streets, like two ghosts in a city of the dead. It was a dark night. Every house looked mysterious and unfamiliar, while every lane led into black nothingness. They made their way to the San Clemente Gate, which gate, like those of the rest of the city, was closed. They climbed, however, the wall on the hill of the Torrione, and, having dropped over on the other side, reached the "Horse Inn" just outside the gate above mentioned.



18.--THE OLD HOUSE IN THE VIA DEL GOVERNO VECCHIO,  
ROME.





## The Flight with the Priest

There they found a two-horse carriage awaiting them in charge of a servant from the "Canale Inn" by the name of Venerino. He had left Arezzo on Sunday evening, at the Ave Maria, before the gates had been shut. They mounted the carriage and drove round outside the walls of the city to the San Spirito Gate, where they took the high road to Rome by way of Perugia.

The first stopping place for the changing of horses was at Camoscia, a little posting-village below Cortona. It was here that Venerino the driver left them and returned to Arezzo. They were clear of the city by about one o'clock in the morning—that is, the morning of Monday, April 29th.

It was alleged that Pompilia had "put a sleeping potion and opium in her husband's wine at dinner" on the night on which she escaped, and furthermore that she had stolen from the house, money, jewellery and clothing of considerable value, and had taken the same with her. When the charge of drugging came up for judgment, it was contended that a girl not yet seventeen years old could hardly be so adept in the art of poisoning as to deceive such a man as Count Guido. The matter, therefore, was not pressed. The accusation of stealing, on the other hand, was supported by considerable and precise detail, as will be considered hereafter.

From Camoscia the lady and the priest hurried southwards on the high road to Rome by way of Perugia, Assisi, Foligno, Narni, Otricoli and Civita Castellana. They drove night and day without a halt, except to change horses and to seek refreshment. They pushed on with feverish haste through a score or more of

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

towns, along endless miles of valley, and over a rampart of tumbled hills, pressing ever for Rome with all the speed that two poor post-horses could make on a sorry road. In this way they reached Castelnuovo at about seven in the evening of Tuesday, April 30th. They had travelled, therefore, through two days of daylight and through one whole night.

Now Castelnuovo is a little posting-place just fifteen miles from Rome. When they halted at this village to change horses Caponsacchi was for forging on to their journey's end, but Pompilia was too exhausted to travel another mile. Whatever fate was in store for her, whatever disaster might befall, she could not move another step. She was wellnigh dead with fatigue. She was in pain. It must be remembered that she was very young, that she was in delicate health and that unless she had slept in the carriage at some post-station while the horses were being changed, she had not closed her eyes since Sunday morning, and it was now Tuesday night. She had passed through a period of the most acute anxiety and suspense. She had listened during every hour since they left Arezzo for the galloping hoofs of men in pursuit. Her very life hung on the fate of this journey. Behind her was the hell of Arezzo; before her was the haven of peace at Rome. It was as if her flight were across a wide river covered with thin ice, whence she could see her enemies hurrying down to the bank behind her and at the same moment could feel her foothold heave and crackle beneath her feet. Roads were rough in Italy two centuries ago, and these runaways had, in forty-two hours, accomplished a journey that occupied the unruffled traveller a week.

## The Flight with the Priest

She must rest at Castelnuovo or die. Thus it was then that, half conscious, half asleep, she was lifted out of the carriage, where her body had stiffened into the contour of the seat, and was carried in Caponsacchi's strong arms to an upper room of the little inn. The inn still stands and still can show this tragic room.

## VIII

### THE SCENE AT CASTELNUOVO

**T**HERE was but one available apartment in the post-house. It contained two beds. One of these the priest ordered to be prepared for Pompilia. Here she threw herself down to rest, while Caponsacchi watched by her. Her last thought, if she thought at all, was of the house in the Via Vittoria, which was but two short hours away across the downs, and her last sense, unless her drowsiness had numbed it, would tell her that the air rustling at the open window blew from off the Campagna of Rome.

Caponsacchi was not long by her side, for he must need see that all was prepared for the last stage of the momentous journey. As the dawn began to break—and here in May it would be light enough to see by four—he ordered the horses to be put in and the carriage made ready for the traverse of the last few miles that separated them from the much-desired city. In less than half an hour they would start, while long before the sun had risen above the Monti Sabini they would see the domes and pinnacles of Rome.

Just as the moment had arrived to rouse Pompilia there came a sound of footsteps on the road, and in the dim light of the dawn the priest saw Count Guido Franceschini coming towards him with a posse of men.



19.—CHURCH OF THE AGONIZZANTI, ROME,  
Where Guido received the Sacrament on his way to execution.



## The Scene at Castelnovo

The tiny town of Castelnovo lies a little off the main road. It was from the town that Guido came. He had pursued the two on horseback, but he had no intention of confronting Caponsacchi alone. Coward as he was he knew the priest too well for that. He did not dash up to the inn on a steaming horse and throw himself from the saddle sword in hand. On the contrary, he crept cautiously up to the house on foot. He had found that the two he sought were at the inn, so he had slunk off to the town, had awakened the magistrate and had come back with a party of such police as the little place afforded. It was neither a heroic nor a dramatic entry. It is to be gathered—although the evidence is conflicting—that both Guido and the canon were armed with a small weapon known as a travelling sword.

Picture them as they face one another in the dim road, how Guido shrinks before the gaze of the priest, how the hand of each flies to the sword hilt, and how by some unconscious, spontaneous movement both men lift their eyes to the lamp-lit upper window of the inn.

A time came some months afterwards when the curious wondered why the insulted husband had not rushed upon the defiler of his home and cut him to the ground. Guido preferred, however, to shelter himself behind the backs of the sturdy yokels who represented the law, and to wait until the monk was safely secured with cords before he assumed the rôle of the principal actor in the scene.

The party now proceeded up the stair to the room in which Pompilia lay asleep. The brave Guido no



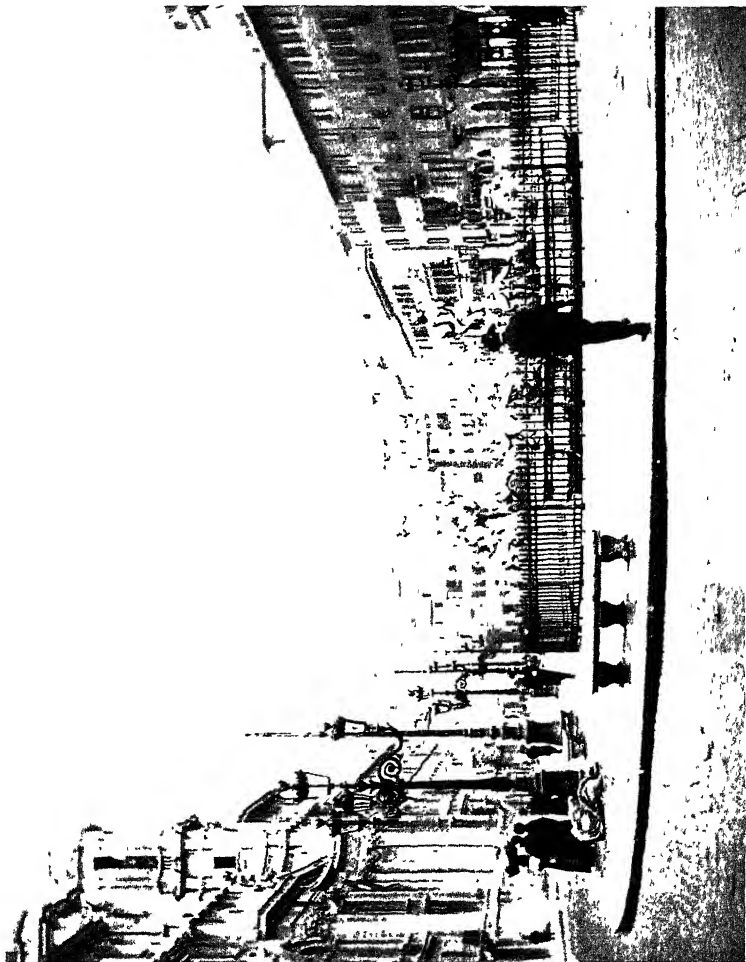
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

doubt led the way, followed by a couple of stumbling louts who had been commissioned to arrest this desperate woman of sixteen. Here one can see Guido flinging open the door and stepping dramatically into the room, where, in the faint light of the dawn and of the still flickering lamp, he would stamp and bellow as the outraged husband. He expected Pompilia, thus suddenly awakened, to assume the part appropriate to the guilty wife, to scream, to throw herself at his feet, and, with tears pouring from her eyes, to confess her shame and implore him to forgive her and to spare her unworthy life. This was the edifying spectacle for the bumpkins of the law that Guido had in his mind when he led them dauntlessly up the stair to the chamber of sin.

Alas! Except as a thing to cuff and abuse he knew nothing of the real Pompilia. Now face to face with the wrecker of her life she showed something of that spirit which had given her patience and courage for three dreary years. She sprang to her feet and defied the gross brute who would have crushed the life out of her and with it another life that was not her own. She snatched the sword from her husband's hand and would have thrust it through his black heart had not the officers seized her and twisted the weapon from her grasp.

Sure one may be of this, that Guido made his way down the tavern stair less with the exalted crest of the champion of virtue than with the drooping head of the whipped hound.

Caponsacchi and Pompilia were taken to Castelnuovo, which lies, as already said, away from the road, and were



20.—THE PIAZZA NAVONA, ROME.



l\odged in the prisons of the somewhat formidable town hall of the place. The prisons and the town hall are yet to be seen, and have apparently altered in no essential since the days when the priest and the girl he had saved climbed up the steep stair that leads to the justice room.

## IX

### AFTER CASTELNUOVO

SOME unimpressive legal proceedings took place in the Pretura of Castelnuovo before the Guardian of the Peace, who would probably have felt more at ease behind his grocery counter than on the magisterial bench. Guido would address the awed man eloquently on the subject of his injured honour and the outrage upon his home. He would, furthermore, give the rustic some insight into the feelings of a nobleman. The clodhoppers who represented the strong arm of the law would tell the story of their doughty deeds, the priest would smile his contempt of it all, while the little countess would gain heart by resting her eyes on the gallant figure of the man who had done his all to save her.

With proper solemnity the two runaways were committed to the Carceri Nuove, or New Prisons, in Rome, and were handed over to the custody of the police from that city. It was a sad ending to a great venture, made sadder when Rome was reached, for on their way to the jail in the Via Giulia, Pompilia would pass the very street where her parents lived, which had been to her for three long years the one spot in the wide world upon which her heart, her love, her hopes of security were fixed.

Some days elapsed between the arrests at the inn

## After Castelnovo

and the committal of the two to the jail in Rome, for on May 3rd Pompilia wrote a letter to her parents, which was addressed from the prison at Castelnovo. As this letter is of some moment it is given here in full.

“My dear Father and Mother :

“I wish to inform you that I am imprisoned here at Castelnovo for having fled from home with a gentleman with whom you are not acquainted. But he is a relative of the Guillichini, who was at Rome, and who was to have accompanied me to Rome. As Guillichini was sick, and could not come with me, the other gentleman came, and I came with him for this reason, because my life was not worth an hour’s purchase. For Guido, my husband, wished to kill me, because he had certain suspicions, which were not true, and on account of these he wished to murder me. I sent you word of them on purpose, but you did not believe the letters sent you were in my own hand. But I declare that I finished learning how to write in Arezzo. Let me tell you that the one who carries this was moved by pity and provided me with the paper and what I needed. So as soon as you have read this letter of mine come here to Castelnovo to give me some aid, because my husband is doing all he can against me. Therefore, if you wish your daughter well, come quickly. I stop because I have no more time.—May 3.

“Directed to Signor Pietro Comparini, Via Vittoria, Rome.”

In due course the two prisoners were brought up for trial before the criminal court at Rome. There were many charges in the indictment, but the fulminating one was the charge of adultery. It soon became assured that Paolo did not intend that the prosecution should languish for want of evidence. The trial dragged on for many months, all through the summer indeed, so that it was not until nearly the end of September that the conclusion was reached.

The chief points advanced against the prisoners were the following :

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

It was asserted by Guido that on their way from Arezzo to Rome they had spent the night together at Foligno, and further that they had been guilty of misconduct at the inn at Castelnuovo. Both these charges remained unproved, and, indeed, in support of the former no scrap of testimony was forthcoming. With regard to Castelnuovo, the evidence of the keeper of the inn and of his servant sufficed to clear the reputation of both Caponsacchi and his companion.

In the second place, the man Venerino, or Borsi, who had driven the two from Arezzo to Camoscia, declared that they kissed one another before his very face as they were travelling along the road. This unfortunate man on his return to Arezzo had been arrested and thrown headlong into jail on the charge of aiding and abetting her ladyship and the priest in their flight, and for having been indulgent to their wickedness. Venerino must have had it brought home to him that there are pitfalls even in the path of a driver of hired carriages, while his position as guardian of the morals of the aristocracy must have weighed heavily upon him. His deposition, however, when forthcoming, did not command respect. "After long rotting in imprisonment" he was released, and the statement that he was let go on condition that his testimony favoured Guido's impressions was never contradicted. Moreover, the night of the escapade was dark, the vehicle was a covered carriage, and the probability that a man driving along a scarcely discernible road at high speed could keep a watch upon the movements of those who sat in the black recess behind him was not accepted as credible. Then again, although he knew the Countess Frances-



21.—THE FOUNTAIN, "IL MORO," PIAZZA NAVONA, ROME.





## After Castelnovo

chini by sight, he was not aware that it was she he was driving to perdition until he had been informed of the enormity.

Thirdly, Guido claimed that after the arrest of the parties he had discovered hidden in the inn those compromising letters which were presumed to have passed between Pompilia and the priest, and of which some account has already been given. These letters have been preserved. They are twenty-one in number. Of these it was declared that eighteen were written by Pompilia and three by Caponsacchi. It is a curious thing that this lady and her friend, if guilty, should have taken care not only to preserve the incriminating letters, but to have carried them with them in their flight. Pompilia, in her examination, declared that at the time the correspondence is supposed to have taken place she could neither read nor write, and that she had never sent letters to anyone by the hand of the servant Maria. Caponsacchi's denial of any concern in the affair was very emphatic. He knew nothing of these miraculously discovered documents. When they were handed to him he declared that not only were they not in his handwriting, but they bore not the slightest resemblance to his script.

Pompilia was then confronted by her marriage settlement, at the foot of which was her name, signed in her own hand. But in reply to this it was pointed out that the signature, crude and brief as it was, was fashioned with so little skill that the same hand could not have penned the elaborate productions Count Guido had discovered at the post-house.

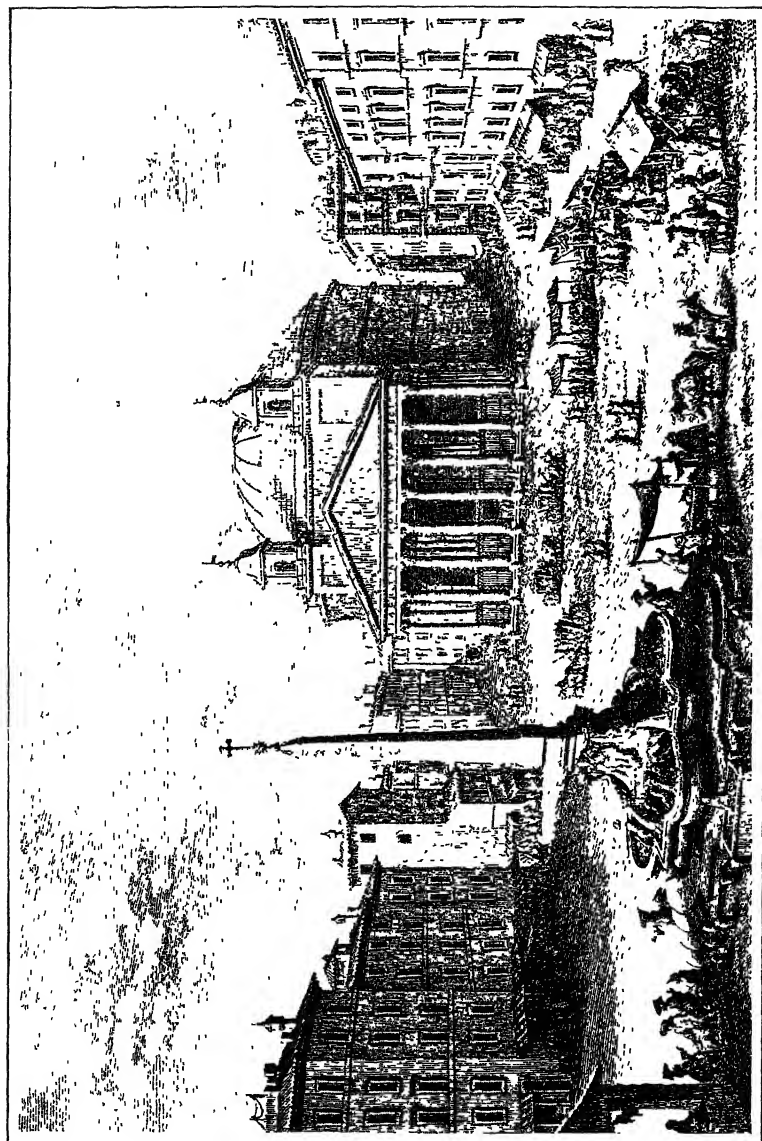
It is true that Pompilia learned to write before she

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

left Arezzo. She mentions the fact in the letter she addressed to her father from the prison at Castelnovo. The accomplishment must have been acquired very late, or she would not have asked her confessor, Romano, to write to Rome in her name on matters of great privacy if she could have communicated with her parents herself.

The letters, however, provide the best refutation of the charge. They are silly enough to be genuine love letters, but not simple enough to be Pompilia's. They are written in an affected and stilted style, and with no small pretence at literary skill. The priest signs himself "Mirtillo" and Pompilia "Amarillis." The effusions of "Amarillis" are the letters of a woman of the world, of a finished coquette, and not of a girl of sixteen. Moreover, the Countess Franceschini was illiterate, and yet in her epistles she refers to the reading of Tasso, regrets that Caponsacchi is not a Theseus, and talks glibly of Æneas, of Ariadne, of Venus and the Graces, and of the Milky Way. Guido, one may believe, extracted these elegant communications from some love story that he had picked up, or that the thoughtful Abbe Paolo had put in his way. It was further to be noted that no evidence was furnished as to whom these letters had been addressed, since no names were attached to any of them.

One small matter did undoubtedly tell against Pompilia. She maintained, in her deposition, that they had reached Castelnovo at dawn. If this had been true there could have been no question as to a night spent at the inn, since Guido must have then overtaken them almost immediately after their arrival. It is certain that they reached Castelnovo, as Caponsacchi says with



22.—THE PIAZZA DELLA ROTONDA AND PANTHEON, ROME.  
*From an Old Print.*



## After Castelnuovo

precision, "On Tuesday evening, the last day of the month of April," their coming being perfectly open and known to everyone at the posting-house. Pompilia must have been aware that the exact hour when the carriage halted would be beyond dispute, whatever might have been her impressions on the subject. She had, it must be remembered, passed through a period of intense strain, had travelled without ceasing through day and night for over forty hours, was ill, was indeed so utterly prostrated that she could not face the small two hours more which would have brought her to safety within the walls of Rome. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that in her state of mind and body

"She made confusion of the reddening white  
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,  
And the next sunrise and its whitening red  
Which she revived in when her husband came."

The result of the trial was as follows: the graver charge was not proved, Caponsacchi was relegated to Civita Vecchia for a period of three years, while Pompilia was sent to the Scalette, or Convent di S. Croce della Penitenza, in Rome. Had the charge of adultery been made good the punishment would have been exceedingly severe, according as the law stood at the moment. As it was the decision given was wise. Both the lady and the canon had been guilty of indiscretion. In the interests of the Church it was not desirable that Caponsacchi should return to his ministry at Arezzo. After three years' banishment to Civita his headstrong and foolish exploit as the rescuer of distressed ladies would be forgotten. As to Pompilia, it was impossible to order her to return to her home in Arezzo. To

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

set her free without some tangible reprimand would be to condone an act that no Court could officially approve of. In the convent she would be free from further molestation on the part of her husband, and would find that peace with which she had been so long unfamiliar. The sentence—if it can be called a sentence—was rather a provision for her safe keeping than a punishment.

The above decision of the Court was verified and confirmed on September 24th, 1697. On October 12th, after but a short stay at the Scalette, Pompilia was allowed to return to her parents' house in the Via Vittoria under a bond of 300 scudi (£60) that "she would not leave the house, either by day or by night, nor show herself at the doors or open windows under any pretence whatever." The fact was that Pompilia's confinement was approaching, and it was inconsistent with the regulations of the convent that she should remain longer within its walls.

While the trial arising out of the Castelnuovo episode was in progress the Comparini, in the name of their foster daughter, instituted proceedings against Count Guido for divorce *a mensa et thoro*. A third action, viz. Pietro's appeal against the decision of the Court in the matter of the dowry, was also at the same time in progress.

Apart from distant rumblings from these legal thunder-clouds, there came once more a period of quietude and clear sky, when all was still both in the Comparini household and in the palace at Arezzo.

## X

### GUIDO DECIDES TO VISIT ROME

**G**UIDO was not getting on well. His great plot to entrap Pompilia and to brand her with disgrace had failed. He was no nearer to the clutching of the gold he had so long pursued, while his prospects of success in the coming action as to the disposal of the dowry were duller than ever. Violante, with her legal suits, buzzed about his ears like a gad-fly and nearly maddened him. He must work out another plan that would give him the two things which were dearest to him in the world—money and revenge.

Now, at this important juncture, a curious thing happened. The Abate Paolo vanished from Rome. Not only did he disappear from Rome, but he vanished from Italy. So completely did he efface himself that he might have been drawn up into Heaven, since he was never heard of again. It was said that he had been dismissed from his post as secretary to the Order of the Knights of St. John of Malta, on account of the scandals which were associated with the name of his family. This might have been the reason of his going had the Order been capable of what would seem to be an act of injustice. His friends declared that the conduct of the Comparini had become so villainous and so persistent in its villany as to exceed the limits of his forbearance, and that as a consequence "he abandoned

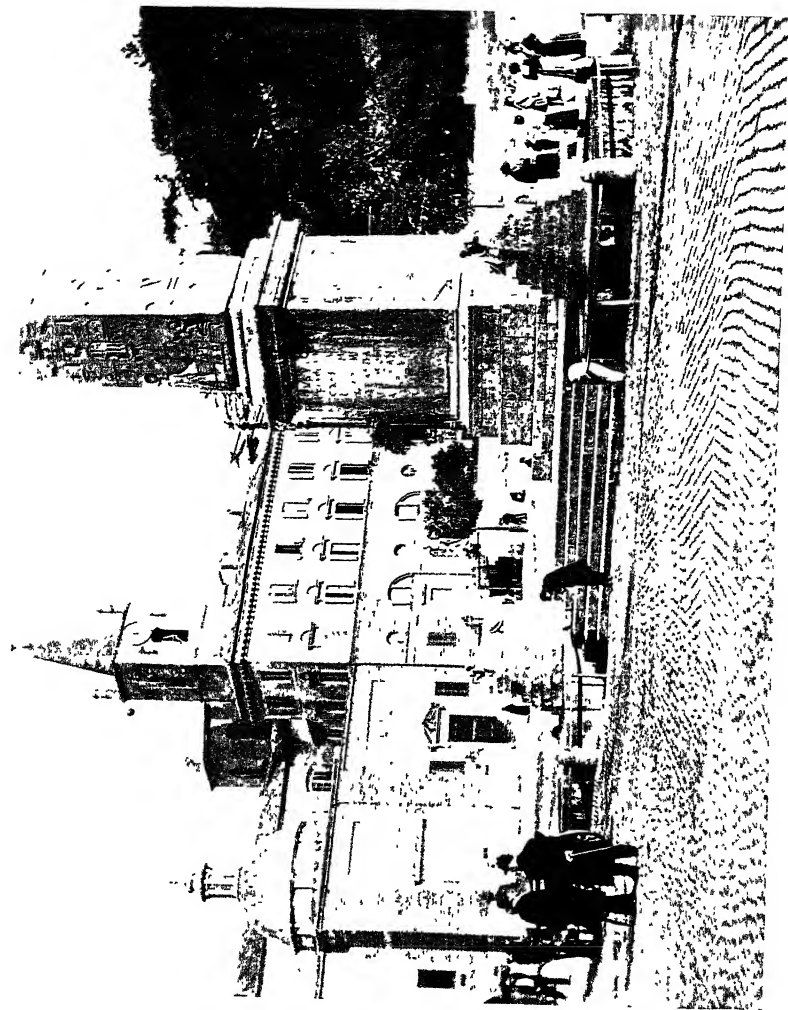


## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

all his hopes and possessions, together with his affectionate and powerful patrons, and went to a strange and unknown clime." This second excuse for flight is less probable than the first, while neither explains why he felt compelled not only to leave Rome, but to disappear from the face of the earth.

There was a third reason for his strange migration, which was accepted as probable by his enemies. Paolo, they said, knew what was going to happen. Count Franceschini, the fool of the family, needed guidance. Some fresh scheme must be forthcoming whereby he could wreak vengeance upon Violante and her "brat," and obtain their money. The scheme he did evolve was so excellent that it was assumed that he *did* have guidance, and that the wise hand that now led him along the uncertain path was once more the hand of brother Paolo.

What would be called the argument or subject-matter of the new plot was as follows: A husband is justified in killing an adulterous wife, while, if certain conditions be fulfilled, such killing is no murder. The attempt to prove that Pompilia was a dishonoured woman had, so far, failed. Let, therefore, another attempt be made to establish this fact by means of an action in the criminal court at Arezzo, where the friendly governor would preside and where the Franceschini name was still of some account. If Pompilia were then declared guilty the weapon for her slaying was at once put into Guido's hand. With her death—as the matter in the Court now stood—the dowry would pass into the count's possession, while if, at the same time, the Comparini chanced to cease to live all legal steps would be stayed,



23.—THE PIAZZA DEL POPOLO, ROME.





## Guido Decides to Visit Rome

and their property would descend through the daughter to her painstaking husband.

This was a better scheme than the plot of the lady and the ardent lover. It was too good a project for Guido to have elaborated unaided. In short, the enemies of the count believed that Paolo whispered into his brother's ear, "Kill all three," and having tendered that advice vanished into an unknown clime, conscious that there is a prejudice against ministers of God who recommend murder as a means of advancement.

Paolo "passed out of Italy" some time in October or early in November, or at least soon after Pompilia had returned to her parents in the Via Vittoria.

In the criminal court at Arezzo three persons, viz. Gregorio Guillichini, Pompilia Franceschini, and Francesco Borsi, otherwise Venerino, were accused of various gross offences. The lady was liberally charged with adultery and theft, the gentleman with adultery and theft and with assisting in the lady's escape from Arezzo, and Borsi, the wretched driver, with the crime "of having given opportunity for flight to the said lady along with the Canon Caponsacchi in the manner told." It is curious that Caponsacchi was not made a party to the charges. Possibly by the laws of Tuscany it would be required that, being a priest, he should be impeached before a different tribunal.

The trial was a ridiculous farce, for neither Guillichini nor the countess appeared, nor do they seem in any way to have been represented. Signor Guillichini, as is well known, was ill in bed at the time of Pompilia's escape, and had no more to do with her flight than to wish her well in her enterprise.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

As to the theft, Guido furnished a very surprising and detailed inventory of the articles abstracted. It was obviously a fictitious catalogue, and designed rather to impress the good people of Arezzo with the varied and elegant possessions of that nobleman than to assist a criminal prosecution. In the first place, he charged his wife with having stolen £40 in gold and silver coin, and with having purloined no fewer than twelve articles of jewellery of great value from the family chest. These trinkets included a pearl necklace valued at £40, a solitaire diamond ring worth £8, and a coronet of carnelians with five settings and a cameo in silver filigree, priced at £2 8s. The total value of the missing jewellery was £85 8s. In addition to this, the young countess stole and took away with her no fewer than forty articles of female clothing, among them being mantles and damask suits, embroidered petticoats and smart jackets, with, indeed, the general equipment of a lavish trousseau. The clothing came to £46 8s., while the total amount credited to the thief rose to no less than £171 16s. This was a large sum for a man to lose who was endeavouring to support an entire family on two pounds of beef a week.

It is apparent from one entry in the schedule that Guido had a sense of humour, and could evolve a quite excellent joke with a quaint and pretty touch of malice in it, for among the list of ladies' clothing, among the embroidered cuffs and sleeves, the shoes with silver buckles and the light blue hose, he puts "a coat of her husband Guido rubbed and rent by the lock of a chest where he kept the aforesaid clothing," the same being the only article with no value appended to it.

## Guido Decides to Visit Rome

The gibe is so good that it must surely have been a product of the nimbler brain of the Abbe Paolo.

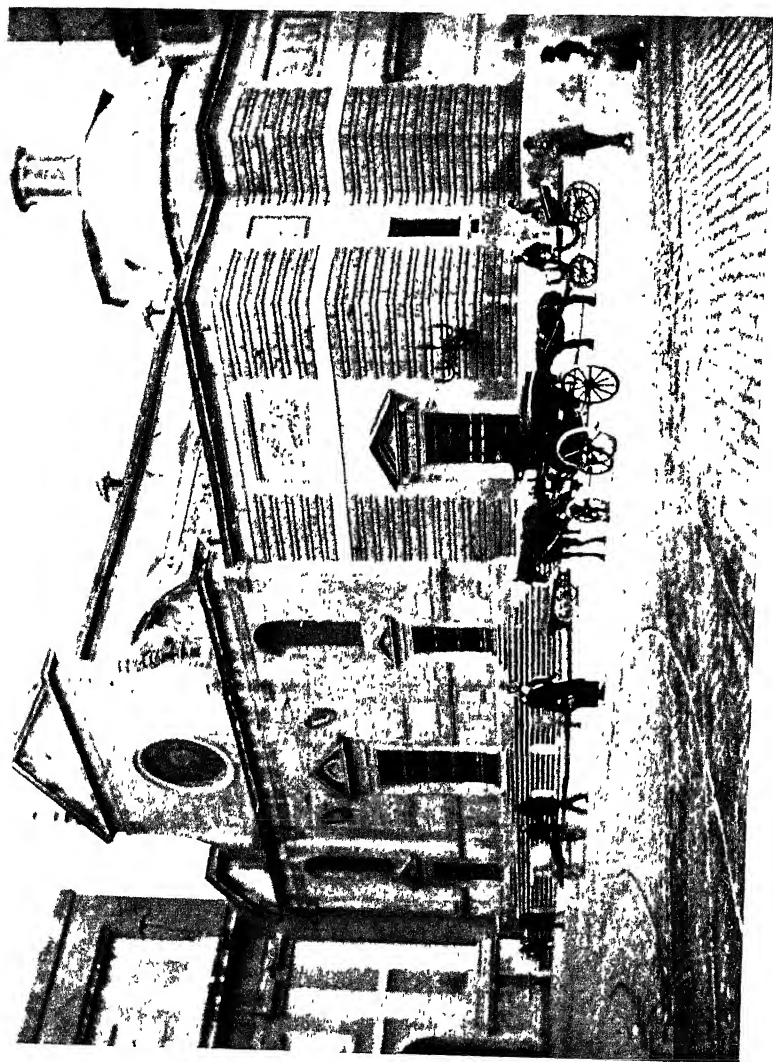
In the matter of the charge, it is needless to say that a solitary girl flying from her home in the depths of the night could hardly carry away with her in her arms over forty articles of clothing; nor, even with the help of the stout Caponsacchi, could this immense outfit have been transferred to the city gate, especially when the alleged robbers had to climb a wall in their progress thither. Even then room had to be found for themselves and this monstrous degree of luggage in a light travelling gig. A further problem presented itself—what had become of all these costumes, of the miscellaneous garments, and of the choice collection of jewellery and precious stones? Guido found, or said that he found, a bundle of love-letters secreted in the inn at Castelnuovo, but of the pile of raiment and of the ornaments of gold, silver and enamelled work, no trace was discovered. Pompilia says, in that part of her deposition which deals with the leaving of Arezzo, “I took some little things of my own, a little box with many trifles inside, and some money, I know not how much there was, from the strong box. These were, moreover, my own, as is evident from the list of things and moneys made by the treasurer of Castelnuovo.” Nothing but what she here describes was ever found. The money that Pompilia had with her, tied up, in schoolgirl fashion, in the corner of a handkerchief, was forty-seven scudi, or £9 8s. in English currency. This money was handed over to the Abate Paolo, as Count Guido’s representative, and was (after appropriate wrangling) employed to pay for Pompilia’s board and lodging

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

while she was in the convent. The fact that it was her husband who was charged with her support while she was under the protection of the Court at the Scalette shows how definitely her innocence had been established.

These and other particulars, however, mattered nothing to the Governor or Commissioner of Arezzo who presided at Pompilia's trial. This upholder of justice was a friend of the Franceschini, and he intended to demonstrate his allegiance. He would show Guido's detractors something of the power of the law. Although he might be a little weak in forensic knowledge, yet in the pronouncing of sentences he was a perfect Minos. In this Court of Arezzo, with no prisoners at the bar except the wretched Venerino, pale with long submersion in jail, the worthy judge laid about him right and left like a mad giant with a sword. In a trice he found all three of the accused guilty, and promptly sentenced Pompilia to penal servitude for life and Signor Guillichini to five years' confinement in the dungeons at Portoferrio, on the island of Elba, with the penalty of the galleys for the same period of time. This latter was quite a severe sentence for a gentleman who had done nothing more than lie upon a bed of sickness and mutter from between the sheets "Bon voyage!" to a runaway lady. The commissioner generously allowed to both of the convicts fifteen days in which to appear and clear themselves. As for Venerino, the governor decided that "he be not prosecuted further and be liberated from prison." This deplorable cabman had surely had enough of the law, for he had been sweltering in jail the whole summer through, where he had gained such insight into things as to make [him, no doubt, resolve never to let his fly





25.—THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DEL POPOLO, ROME.



## Guido Decides to Visit Rome

be used again for the conveyance of young unmarried people along the Perugia road at two o'clock in the morning.

This very Pantagruelian sentence needed to be confirmed by the Chancery of the Criminal Court at Florence, and before that Court the matter came late in the year. The judge who reviewed the case endorsed the verdict of guilty against the first two prisoners—the young countess and the gentleman who had been ill in bed; but he seemed to have been shocked by the severity of their respective sentences, for he gave his decision that Guillichini's sentence to the galleys should be subject to the pleasure of His Serene Highness, while, as the countess was in Rome, secured in a sacred place, he decreed that all action with reference to her punishment should be suspended. Furthermore, the Court was benevolent enough to express the opinion that Venerino "had done no voluntary evil."

Above all this legal trumpeting the fact remained that Pompilia Franceschini had been found guilty of adultery by the Commissioner of Arezzo, and that verdict had been confirmed by the Criminal Court at Florence. Guido had now at last secured what he wanted, and the very moment the decision at Florence was assured he took his departure for Rome for the second time. When his friends asked him why he was going to Rome for Christmas, he answered cheerily that he was going there to murder his wife.

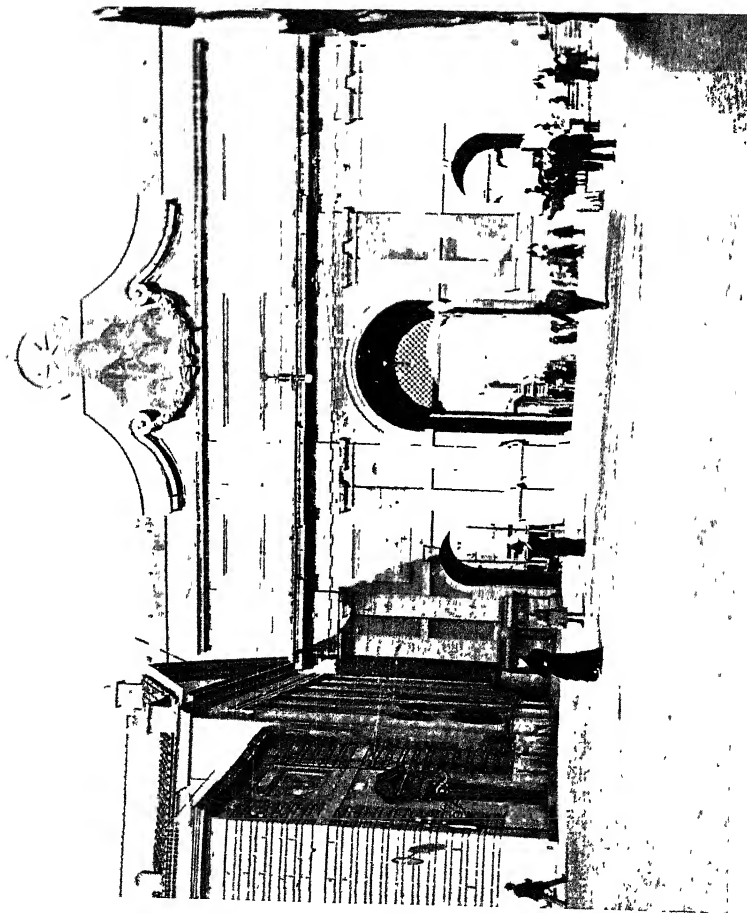
## XI

### THE MURDER IN THE VIA VITTORIA

WHILE all these things were stirring in Tuscany there was no little excitement in Rome in the quiet house in the Via Vittoria. On December 18th Pompilia gave birth to a son. It may well be imagined that her delight was unbounded, that Violante cackled up and down the street like a fussy hen, while Pietro, with much enforced leisure on his hands, held forth as to the wondrous faculties of the babe to his friends at the tavern. Pompilia named her boy "Gætano" after a recently canonised saint. In the poem she tells why she chose the name.

"Something put it in my head  
To call the boy 'Gætano'—no old name—  
For sorrow's sake ; I looked up to the sky  
And took a new saint to begin anew.  
One who has only been made saint—how long ?  
Twenty-five years : so, carefuller, perhaps,  
To guard a namesake than those old saints grow  
Tired out by this time,—see my own five saints !"

St. Gætan, moreover, was a saint after her own heart. He was born of noble parents in Vicenza in the year 1480. He became a priest, and, travelling to Rome, joined The Congregation of the Love of God. He raised this body to great influence, making its chief objects earnestness and simplicity of life and the care of those who were unhappy or in dire distress. His



26.—THE PORTA DEL POPOLO, ROME.



## The Murder in the Via Vittoria

life was one of suffering and self-denial. He died at Naples in 1547, and was buried in that city. He was canonised by Clement X. in the year 1671, only twenty-six years before Pompilia's boy was born.

That the Comparini had some anxiety as to the safety of the child may be gathered from the fact that he was sent away secretly almost immediately after his birth, although in all probability his hiding place was not very far from his mother's home.

Guido reached Rome on Christmas Eve, when the city was rejoicing in its holiday, and when from every campanile rang forth the message of "Peace on earth, good will towards men." The church bells, the sounds of merriment in the streets, the glimpses of happy family gatherings seen through lamplit windows, the pictures everywhere of the Madonna as the proud mother with her babe, must have jarred upon his senses, for he had not come to Rome to celebrate the birth of Christ, but to kill his wife.

The noble count did not undertake this mission alone. He had brought with him four agricultural labourers as assistants. With so large a party one might have supposed that he came with the object of farming the waste places of Rome, had not these brawny louts been engaged in the capacity of bravoos, and were prepared, for a few scudi, to hack to pieces a girl of seventeen who was just then scarcely able to rise from her bed. Browning speaks of these willing countrymen as "these God-abandoned wretched lumps of life," and regards them as the last human clods in whom any glimmer of intelligence may be traced.

They came from Vitiano, a village a few miles south

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

of Arezzo on the way to Perugia. In this place Guido had a vineyard, and on this vineyard the four men were employed when they were not whetting their daggers on the vineyard wall. Guido went so far as to say that at least one of these ruffians was possessed of such a delicate and acute moral feeling that he begged to be allowed the privilege of assisting his master in avenging the stain upon his honour. A farm labourer so sensitive on the subject of the purity of the home must have been highly esteemed in the hamlet of Vitiano.

The names of these four were interesting, inasmuch as they seem in some sonorous way to be peculiarly fitting to the men who bore them. Is not the name of Blasio Agostinelli—sounding vaguely like a foreign oath—an expressive title for a brigand? Could Alessandro Baldeschi—who was very busy with his dagger by the by—be better named? Or could a writer of romance find more picturesque names for hired assassins or robber chiefs than those of Domenico Gambassini or Francesco Pasquini?

Guido appears to have explained to his assistants that, although the invalid countess was the main object of his visit, there was a cackling old woman of sixty-six and a doddering old man of sixty-nine who might need to be destroyed, their deaths being, however, merely incidental to the main slaughtering.

Five armed men, in the prime of life, seemed a large number to be required for the stabbing of an aged couple and a sick girl, but I think the cautious nobleman had an idea that he might meet Caponsacchi in this venture. He had seen enough of Caponsacchi to



## The Murder in the Via Vittoria

have no desire to encounter him again, while, on the other hand, he felt that if supported by four savage cut-throats, armed to the teeth, he would be able to face an unarmed priest, even of the type of the one he had come upon at Castelnuovo.

Guido and his party, on reaching Rome, concealed themselves in Abbe Paolo's vineyard, near the Ponte Milvio. The abbe had left Italy at least a month ago, while a vineyard in December is little more than a desert of gnarled sticks, so the retreat was good. There was on the ground a so-called villa. It would be no more than a garden house necessary for the operations in the vineyard, with probably a superior room or two for the use of the master in the summer. Here the count and the four countrymen lay hidden for nine days. It must have been a cheerless Christmas, made even morose by contrast, for as they gathered round the scrap of fire in the evening they could hear the sound of the church bells in Rome. Here, behind closed shutters, they would "Salute the happy morn," for here they passed both Christmas Day and New Year's Eve. Two of the cut-throats were mere lads, and when they heard the Angelus ring on the last day of the old year, it is possible that their thoughts travelled back to their homes in Tuscany and that their hearts failed them.

How stirring was the Christmas festival in Rome may be understood by the following extract from the diary of John Evelyn. He spent the Christmas of 1644 in the city he calls "The Proud Mistress of the World." "On Christmas Eve," he writes, "I went not to bed, being desirous of seeing the many extraordinary ceremonies performed then in their churches as midnight

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

masses and sermons. I walked from church to church the whole night in admiration at the multitude of scenes and pageantry which the friars had, with much industry and craft, set out to catch the devout women and superstitious sort of people, who never parted without dropping some money into a vessel set on purpose; but especially observable was the puppetry in the Church of the Minerva, representing the Nativity. I thence went and heard a sermon at the Apollinare, by which time it was morning. On Christmas Day his Holiness sang Mass, the artillery of St. Angelo went off, and all this day was exposed the cradle of our Lord."

Guido would have found in the sitting-room of the villa many tokens of his brother, which would remind him of the days before they began to plot. "The idle door that missed the master's step," the lonely room with its grave silence broken only by an occasional clatter of oaths from the kitchen, would have shaken the resolve of many men, but Guido had done with peace on earth, and was dead to good will towards men. He sat in the dark, thumbing the edge of his dagger, and cursing the cottagers who disturbed his dream of death by chanting a hymn as they walked back from the jubilant city.

On the evening of Thursday, January 2nd, the five miscreants made their way into Rome. The moon would be about rising, for it was full moon on December 30th. Entering the North gate they would find themselves at once in the Piazza del Popolo. But a little way from the piazza, and approached either by the Strada Paolina (now the Via del Babuino) or by the Corso, was the quiet little lane known as the Via Vittoria. It



27.—ON THE ROAD FROM ROME TO THE  
PONTE MILVIO.



28.—FOUNTAIN BY THE ROADSIDE ON  
THE WAY TO THE PONTE MILVIO.



## The Murder in the Via Vittoria

is significant that it was in the Piazza del Popolo that these ruffians first trod the soil of Rome, since that soil is also the last piece of ground touched by the feet of many, the piazza being a place where criminals are hanged.

They reached the house at the corner of the Via Vittoria and the Strada Paolina about 8 o'clock in the evening. Blasio and Gambassini were left on guard in the street on either side of the house. Guido, who had disguised himself as a countryman, walked up to the door alone. He found it closed. He knocked and could hear within a chair pushed back, and then footsteps in the passage. It was Violante who had risen and was coming to the door. She asked who was there. Guido replied in a feigned voice, "A messenger with a letter from Canon Caponsacchi." In a moment the bolts were withdrawn and the door thrown generously open. There stood the smiling Violante, with her hand outstretched for the note. Guido fell upon her and hacked her to death. It was noted afterwards that most of her wounds were in the face, in that hated face that Guido loathed above all things in the world. Franceschini then rushed in, followed by two of his gang. Pietro, dumbfounded with alarm, stood in the way. He was cut down just as he—realising his fate—shrieked out the word "Confession."

Now Pompilia, hearing this tumult in the doorway, this hideous riot of trampling feet, of yells and curses, of groans and the thud of knives, blew out the light and fled towards the door that opened on the courtyard, where was an entry to a locksmith's house. Looking back along the passage she saw the horrible figure of her

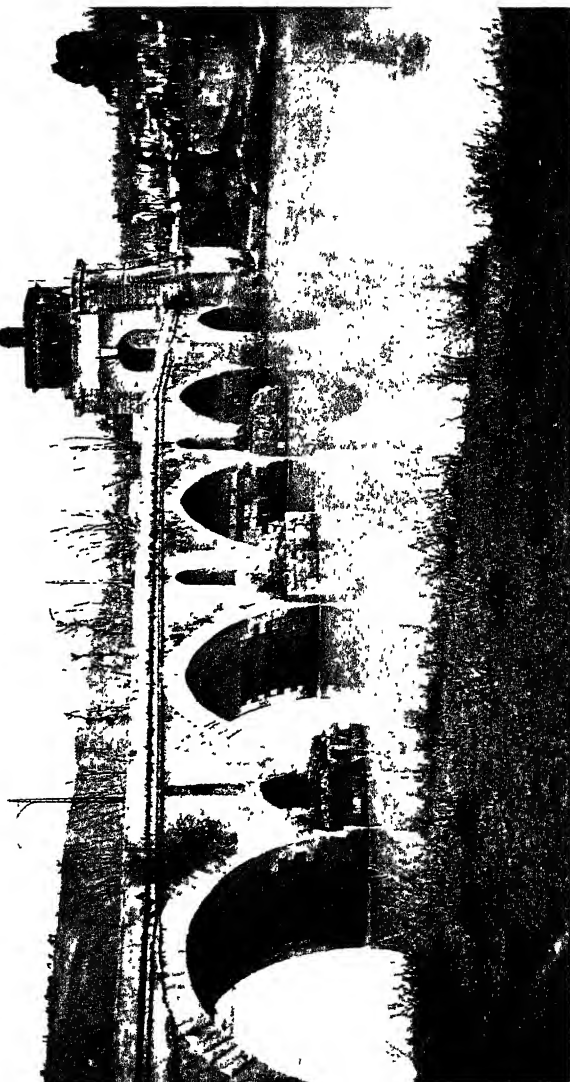
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

husband coming towards her with a lantern in his hand, spattered with blood, and snarling like a wolf. She rushed into a room and hid under a bed. He followed, and by the light of the lantern she could watch him stalk into the room and then see his clawlike hand feeling about to find her beneath the couch. He gripped her, dragged her out—pulling the bed, to which she clung, across the floor—and spluttering forth a torrent of hate he stabbed her, like a frenzied epileptic, in more than a score of places. The two braves had followed their master, but the bloody deed was done, although later on Pasquini boasted that he had inflicted four or five additional wounds upon Pompilia in the back. The brave Pasquini seemingly wished it to be known that he had done something to earn his money.

Guido now called upon the two to make sure that his wife was dead; so one of them, probably the heroic Pasquini, lifted her off the ground by her hair, and then dropped her, so that she fell with her head on the body of old Pietro, who was now quite still.

Once more all was silent, and in the pause Guido would glance round the familiar room and recall the time when he first met Pompilia there. Then stepping over the three bodies that lay in his way, and giving a vicious kick at Violante as he passed, he stepped out into the street to join his companions.

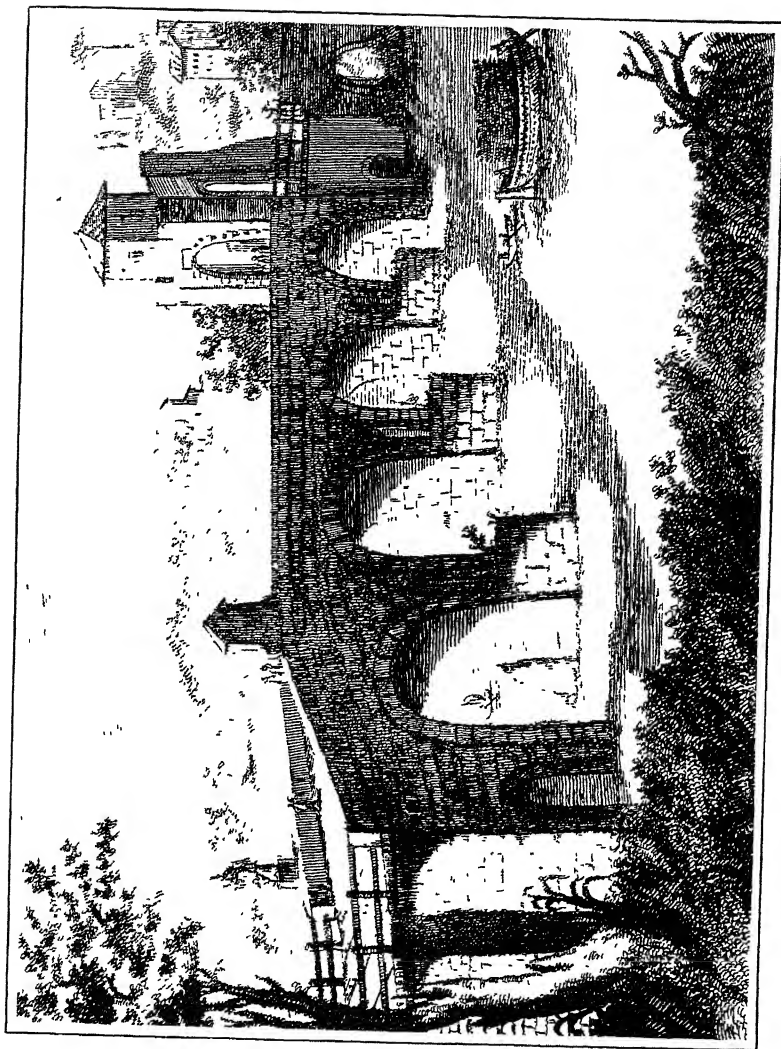
The work had been well accomplished, except in two particulars. In their haste one of the murderers had left his coat in the house, while Guido, in groping for his wife beneath the bed, had dropped his cap.



29.—THE PONTE MILVIO, ROME.







30. —THE PONTE MILVIO, ROME.  
*from Vœu's 'Antichità di Roma,' 1763.*



## XII

### GUIDO'S ARREST

THE street was now in an uproar. Windows were being thrown open and people were pouring out of every door. The alarm had reached the Corso, so that passers-by were running down the Via Vittoria to the house at the corner.

The five made a dash for the Piazza del Popolo, gained the gate, and sped for their lives along the straight unlovely road that leads to the Ponte Milvio. They made first of all for the house in the vineyard, where they had been hiding, and then took the Via Cassia, intending to make all speed for the Tuscan frontier and Arezzo. They might have gone by the Via Flaminia through Castelnuovo, but the road they selected was the better of the two, since it led at once to the open Campagna and was but little frequented.

Guido had made one mistake. He had provided no horses for the journey home, and, moreover, had not obtained the official permit, without which post-horses could not be secured on the road. He stopped at the first inn upon the way, and there demanded horses, with threats of violence, but the landlord declined to furnish them as the necessary order could not be produced. Guido was disguised as a yokel and unattractive when at his best. He therefore probably failed to convince the innkeeper that he was a distinguished nobleman,

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

and that the four unkempt savages with him were members of his suite.

There was no course open to them, therefore, but to proceed on foot; so they made the best of their way across the open Campagna, along a road which was then, as it is now, a track across an absolute solitude. After tramping through the better part of the night they arrived at the lonely "tavern of Merluzza," which is "towards Baccano." This inn is about  $14\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the walls of Rome and some  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of Baccano. Here, utterly exhausted by their headlong flight and attracted, no doubt, by the isolation of the inn, they sought refuge and rest. In the first room they entered they threw themselves down to sleep, lying huddled together like swine, with the blood hardly yet dry upon their weapons. Here they were discovered at the break of dawn by the police officers who had pursued them from Rome.

The leader of the troop, one Captain Patrizi, had shown remarkable promptitude in effecting this capture. Hurrying to the scene of the murder he met a neighbour who had overheard one of the assassins say, as they left the house, "Let us make for the vineyard." To the vineyard Patrizi and his party at once galloped, only to find that the fugitives had left the place about an hour before, and had gone "in the direction of the highway."

Guido and his companions, tied to horses and with their arms pinioned behind their backs, were taken again to Rome along the very road by which they had fled, were taken across the Piazza del Popolo and by the end of the Via Vittoria. As he looked down the street he could see the gaping crowd standing and gossiping

## Guido's Arrest

still in front of the house where the murder had been done. A great rabble of people, it is said, came out to meet them, and by this hooting mob they were followed to the Carceri Nuove, or New Prisons, in the Via Giulia. They reached the prisons about 5 o'clock on the same evening. This was the identical jail in which Pompilia and Caponsacchi had been confined after the affair at Castelnuovo.

Guido, who had probably been blustering and violent when first arrested, received an item of news on his way back to Rome which kept him silent for the rest of the journey. He asked one of the police how it was that they associated him with this particular murder in the Via Vittoria. The officer answered, "Your wife told us that you had stabbed her and her parents." It was in this abrupt fashion that Guido learned that Pompilia was yet alive.

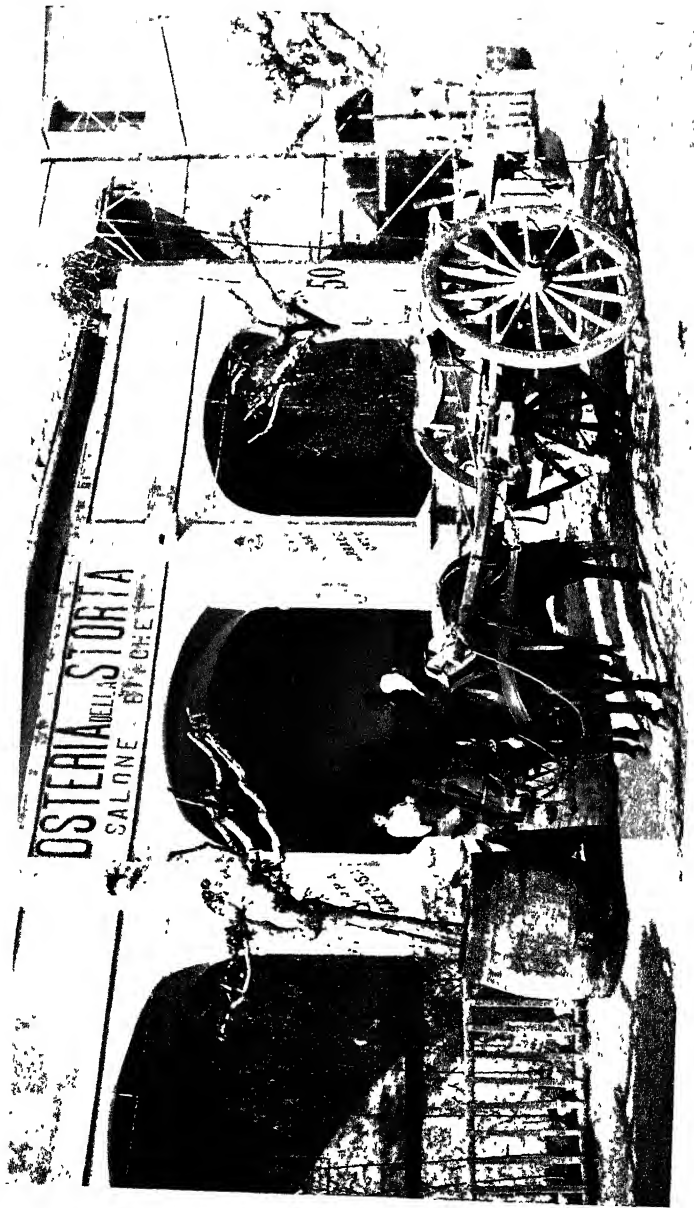
## XIII

### THE DEATH OF POMPILIA

POMPILIA died in the house in the Via Vittoria which had been her home since childhood, and in which she had met her woeful husband for the last time. Browning, with great artistic effect, places the scene of her death in a "hospital hard by," "in the long white lazar house" of Saint Anna; but no such house had any existence, while the entry in the register of the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina (given at the end of this volume) shows that she died in the street which had been familiar to her from babyhood.

Guido and his bravoës could hardly have clattered out of sight before neighbours and passers-by poured into the house, stumbling in the dark over the dead bodies by the door, slipping on the clotted blood in the passage, and falling against the overturned furniture which blocked their way. They would be guided by the feeble moans which came from one black corner in the little room.

The first person apparently to enter was one Giuseppe d'Andillo. I think he must have been the locksmith who lived next door. He picked Pompilia up from the ground "where she lay in utter weakness because of her wounds. She had her head upon the legs of Signor Pietro Comparini, who was already dead." A confessor and a surgeon were immediately sent for.



31.—THE INN AT LA STORTA CONNECTED WITH GUIDO'S FLIGHT.





## The Death of Pompilia

Pompilia was placed upon a bed, probably upon the very bed underneath which she had crept when she saw Guido coming along the passage with a lantern and a dripping dagger. She made confession to the Principal of the Greek College while she was being held up in the arms of Giuseppe d'Andillo, "because," as he says, "she could neither rise nor lie down." The Greek College was—and still is—attached to the Church of St. Atanasio, in the Strada Paolina, which church is but a few doors from the scene of the murder. The principal of the college appears to have been the Abate Liberato Barberito, Doctor of Theology. He was a foreigner, having come from Monopoli (near Brindisi), in the Kingdom of Naples. The abate was deeply impressed with Pompilia's Christian resignation, with the generosity of her forgiveness, with the tenderness of her conscience, as well as with her heroism. Indeed, he says that he had "never observed the dying with like sentiments."

Besides these two, no fewer than eight other men came to Pompilia's assistance, and of these at least four appear to have been with her night and day until she died. She had, indeed, around her bed ten devoted men, but no mention is made, curiously enough, of any women. Among the ten were Giovanni Guitens, the apothecary; Luca Corsi, his assistant; and Giovanni Mucha, the apothecary's boy. There were also Dionysio Godyn and the Marquis Nicolo Gregorio, probably passers-by, who dropped in on the raising of the alarm.

But the most devoted and the most worshipful of the ten was a barefooted Augustinian named Fra Celestino Angelo. His admiration of the dying Pompilia was

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

unbounded and indeed most pathetic. He was with her "from the first instant of her pitiful case, even to the very end of her life." He speaks of her as "that ever blessed child," "that saint," "that martyr." He maintains, with vehemence and enthusiasm, her absolute innocence, tells how, with tears in her eyes and with compassionate voice, she forgave her husband with all her heart, and how she died with these last words on her lips: "May God have pity on me." He marvels at "the modesty and calm of so young a girl in the presence of so many men," and is sure that her soul was at one with God. Never did a woman have a more whole-hearted champion than had Pompilia in the person of this barefooted Augustinian friar. Fra Celestino Angelo belonged to the Church of Gesu e Maria, a church close by in the Corso, and in fact only a few steps from the house in which the little countess died.

From the entry in the parish register (given at the end of this volume) it will be seen that Pompilia received all the most holy sacraments before she died, and that, with her foster parents, Violante and Pietro Comparini, she was buried in the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina. Pompilia died on January 6th, just four days after her husband's murderous attack.

## XIV

### THE TRIAL FOR MURDER

THE trial of Count Guido Franceschini and his associates for the murders in the Via Vittoria was commenced in Rome in January, 1698, and was not concluded until the middle of February. The president of the Court was His Reverence Marco Antonio Venturini, the Vice-Governor of Rome. The counsel for the prosecution were Francesco Gambi, Procurator of the Fisc (or Treasury) and Giovanni Battista Bottini, Advocate of the Fisc. The defence was undertaken by Giacinto Arcangeli, Procurator of the Poor, and Desiderio Spreti, Advocate for the Poor. Those who appeared against the prisoners were official State attorneys, who held the position of the Public Prosecutor of modern times. The counsel for the defence also were attorneys provided by the State and not advocates privately employed by the defendants. Signor Arcangeli at one period takes pains to say, "I have assumed the defence without a penny of compensation."

According to the custom of the time the pleadings were made in writing, in the form of "Memorials" laid before the Court. The memorials presented by one side would be answered by further memorials brought forward by the other. These would all be in writing, for no speeches were made before the judge. Thus

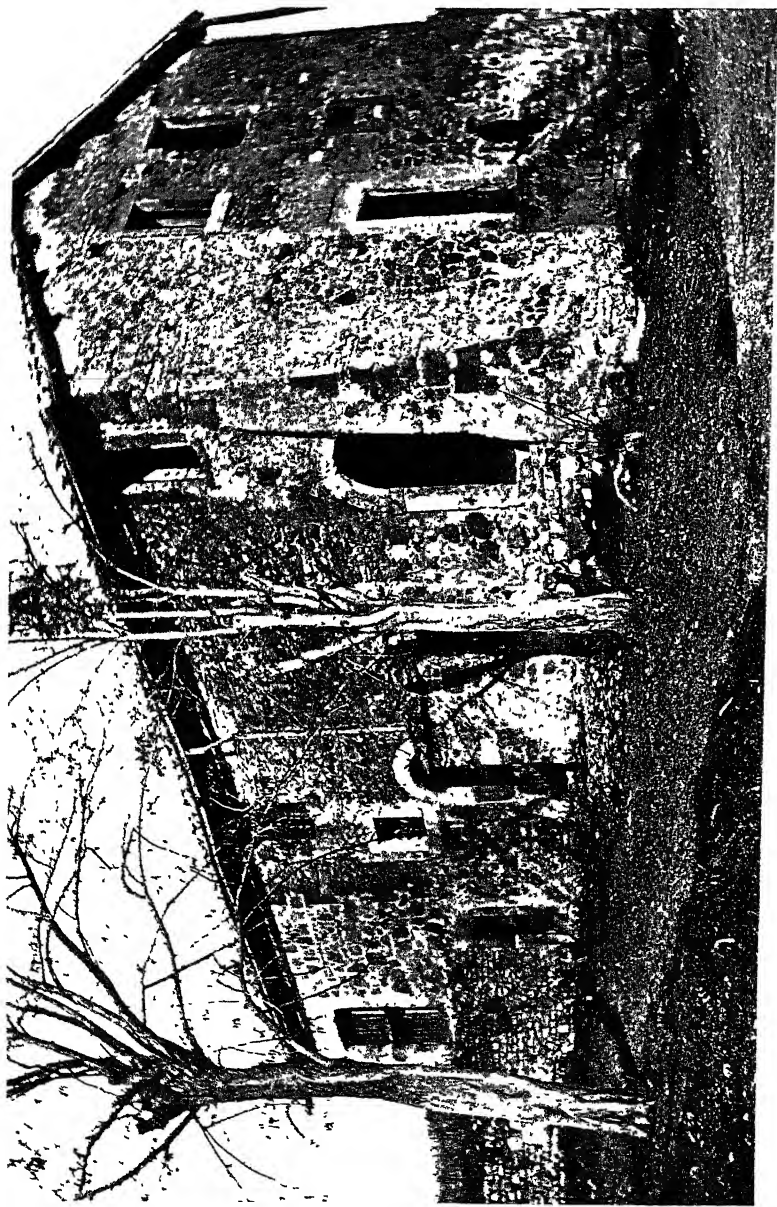
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Girolamo Lunadoro, in his very interesting "Relazione della Corte di Roma,"\* says: "The Advocate of the Poor has charge to *write* free of cost for all poor and needy persons." Moreover, he explains, in the same book, the different functions of the procurator and the advocate. The advocate, whether for the prosecution or the defence, dealt with points of law, while the procurator concerned himself with points of fact. Thus in the documents set forth in the Yellow Book are both memorials of law and memorials of fact. In addition to the memorials, certain summaries were presented by either side, in which were contained the attestations of the various parties, together with any letters or documents bearing upon the case.

The defence of the prisoners was almost entirely upon points of law. The murders could not be denied. The prisoners had been captured red-handed. Pompilia's testimony was clear and unassailable, while any doubt as to the share taken by the five men before the Court was cleared up by their own confessions, extracted while they were under the torture. The lawyers for the defence, indeed, concentrated all their forces upon the attaining of two objects—upon proving that the murder was justified, on the one hand; and upon claiming an exemption from the death penalty, should the Court decline to accept justification, on the other.

Arcangeli and Spreti argued that a husband was justified in killing an adulterous wife, and in thus wiping out with her blood the stain of infamy cast upon his honour. They maintained that Pompilia's adultery was proved upon the following grounds:

\* Padua, 1685.



32.—THE INN AT MERLUZZA WHERE GUIDO WAS ARRESTED.



## The Trial for Murder

1. Her fleeing from her husband's home with the young priest.

2. The love-letters which had passed between the two.

3. The fact that they were seen kissing one another in the carriage on the way to Perugia.

4. The fact that they occupied the same room at the inn at Castelnuovo.

5. The clandestine visits paid by Caponsacchi to Pompilia while she was with her foster parents in Rome.

6. The sentence of the judge upon the two after their arrest at Castelnuovo.

To avoid repetition it may be well to give at once the answer of the lawyers on the other side to these six points :

1. Pompilia fled from Arezzo because she was fully convinced that her life was in danger. She could not make her way to Rome alone. She had consulted Canon Conti on the subject. He was a relative and familiar friend of the Franceschini, and it was he who had advised the distressed woman to beg Caponsacchi to conduct her to Rome. There is no trustworthy evidence to show that Caponsacchi ever went to the Franceschini Palace until he went there to take Pompilia away. Had he been her lover, what need had they to leave Arezzo at all, and why in their flight should they have made such frantic haste to reach Rome of all places in Italy? There is not a scrap of evidence forthcoming to support the idea of any intimacy between Pompilia and the priest, the testimony of the wretched woman Margherita Contenti being not worthy of a hearing.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

2 and 3. The questions of the love-letters and of the reported kissing in the carriage have been already disposed of (p. 55). Apart from the fact that Pompilia was unable to write, and that the messages attributed to Caponsacchi were not in his handwriting, the letters themselves afford the best proof that they were forgeries. The utter lack of probability in the statement of the driver as to the kissing has been emphasised (p. 54), while the circumstances under which his testimony was given make his evidence of little value (p. 54).

4. Not one particle of evidence was adduced to support the suggestion that any impropriety took place at the inn at Castelnuovo.

5. The assertion that Caponsacchi visited Pompilia after she had left the convent and had returned to the house of the Comparini in the Via Vittoria is a reckless fiction. There is, on the other hand, every assurance that the priest never left Civita Vecchia between the time of his banishment to that town and the fatal day in January when the murders were committed.

6. With regard to the last-named point, it was admitted that the decree of banishment of the priest was worded as follows: "September 24, 1697. Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi of Arezzo, for complicity in flight and running away of Francesca Comparini, and for carnal knowledge of the same, has been banished for three years to Civita Vecchia." It was, however, shown that the words employed in this decree merely reproduce the title or subject of the charge. They do not show that the charge was proved, and indeed it never was proved. The wording of the order was admitted by the officials responsible for the same to be misleading and





## The Trial for Murder

untrue, and a modification of the decree was allowed by the Court. This item of supposed evidence therefore came to nothing.

Count Guido's advocates went on to state that the delay in the killing of the errant wife did not make her fault the less, and that the injury to the husband's honour still remained, while the sense of his shame was rather increased by reflection and a fuller contemplation of his position.

He might have killed Pompilia with impunity at Castelnuovo, but he preferred to leave her punishment to the law; moreover, he was alone, was exhausted by his breathless journey and was not well enough armed to meet so formidable an antagonist as the young priest. The law failed him. He could not slay his wife so long as she was confined in the convent, but he did avenge his bitter wrong the moment that he found that she was free.

The same injured honour which impelled Count Guido to slay his wife, also justified him in slaying the two Comparini. They had been the cause of the whole trouble. They had tricked and robbed him. They had foisted upon him a girl of the lowest origin, and had thereby brought disgrace upon the name he bore and exposed him to the contempt and ridicule of the world. They had, moreover, aided and abetted Pompilia in her infamous conduct, had sheltered an adulterous woman, and had thereby condoned and apparently approved her offence. Finally, it was in response to the word "Caponsacchi" that Violante had opened the door so readily on the fatal evening of January 2nd.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

The prosecution had brought against Count Guido two other charges, both of which were punishable by death: one was the carrying of prohibited arms, and the other was the unlawful assembling together of armed men. But as Guido had ample justification for taking the life of his wife and of those who had assisted her, he was also justified, it was urged, in taking such means as he thought fit to effect this object.

As the trial proceeded, it was evident that the case for the defence became weaker and weaker, until finally the advocate, Spreti, devoted his energies to such arguments as bore, not against a sentence, but against the extreme sentence of the penalty of death. He quoted many cases in support of his pleading, claimed consideration for his client on the grounds of his being a nobleman and connected in a minor degree with the priesthood, and urged that the fault of his client—if any—was the failure at once to kill the disgraced countess when he caught her in company with the priest at Castelnuovo.

The case for the prosecution was simple and very readily placed before the Court. The crime was a cowardly, cold-blooded murder of three helpless people, plotted and carried out with the utmost deliberation. The object of this wholesale slaughter was no other than "damnable greed" on the one hand, and malignant revenge on the other. Guido did not want his wife's life: he wanted her money. He quietly waited until after the child was born "in order that he might make safe his succession to the property."

The plea of adultery was merely an excuse. The charge, after the closest examination, remained unproved.



34.—A STREET IN AREZZO.



## The Trial for Murder

Pompilia's dying statement as to her innocence must be accepted as absolute truth. The young countess fled from Arezzo because she believed her life to be in danger. Assuming that her husband was honestly deceived as to the reason for her flight, and that he was convinced that she had left her home with Caponsacchi because the priest was her lover, why had he not slain her at Castelnuovo? He says that he was no match for Caponsacchi, who was better armed than he was; but Caponsacchi had been immediately pinioned by the police, and the injured husband had only to go up the stair of the inn and stab his wife to death as she lay in bed.

Admitting some error in this delay, Count Guido's advocates claimed that he *did* execute sentence upon his wife at the next available opportunity. It is true that he could not approach her while she was under the charge of the nuns at the convent; but she left the convent for her father's house on October 12th, and the murder did not take place until January 2nd.

He crept to his wife's house treacherously and in disguise, and obtained an entry by means of a trick. Had he still believed that he was justified in killing his wife for an offence that had been committed eight months previously, for what reason did he kill the two old Comparini? He deliberately came to Rome with the intention of murdering all three, or he would not have taken the trouble to bring so many armed men with him all the way from Tuscany.

The crime was nothing more than a common, brutal, carefully planned murder for the purpose of getting possession of the money of the dead, and the only

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

fitting punishment for so mean and dastardly a crime was the penalty of death for all the five ruffians concerned.

The Court found the prisoners guilty of wilful murder, and declined to recognise any extenuating circumstances. The sentence of death was passed upon them all. The four countrymen were condemned to be hanged, but Guido, as being of noble birth, was allowed the sorry privilege of meeting death by the edge of the executioner's axe.

The decision of the Court was given on February 18th. Guido's friends at once demanded a stay of execution on the ground that as the count had taken some minor orders he could claim the benefit of clergy. As a further ground for postponement it was urged that one of the murderers, Francesco Pasquini, was a minor. Both of these matters were referred to His Holiness the Pope, who promptly disallowed both pleas, and gave it as his decision that the law should take its course. The Pope signed the warrant "of his own accord" at eight o'clock on the evening of February 21st, whereupon the execution of the five prisoners was fixed for the following day.

The Pope who thus comes into the story was Antonio Pignatelli, a native of Naples, who held office under the title of Innocent XII. At the time of Count Guido's execution he was eighty-three years of age. He died in 1700, a little more than two years after he had signed the fatal warrant. His coat of arms was the most curious of any Pope, viz. on a plain shield three little earthen ewers. This was in reference to his name, since "pignatello" is a small earthen pot. His portraits show him

## The Trial for Murder

to be a man with a high forehead and a fine intellectual face. He wore a little moustache, after the fashion of the gallants of the time, with a small pointed tuft of hair on the chin. While the upper part of his face was that of a philosopher, the lower part was that of a gay cavalier.



## XV

### THE EXECUTION IN THE PIAZZA DEL POPOLO

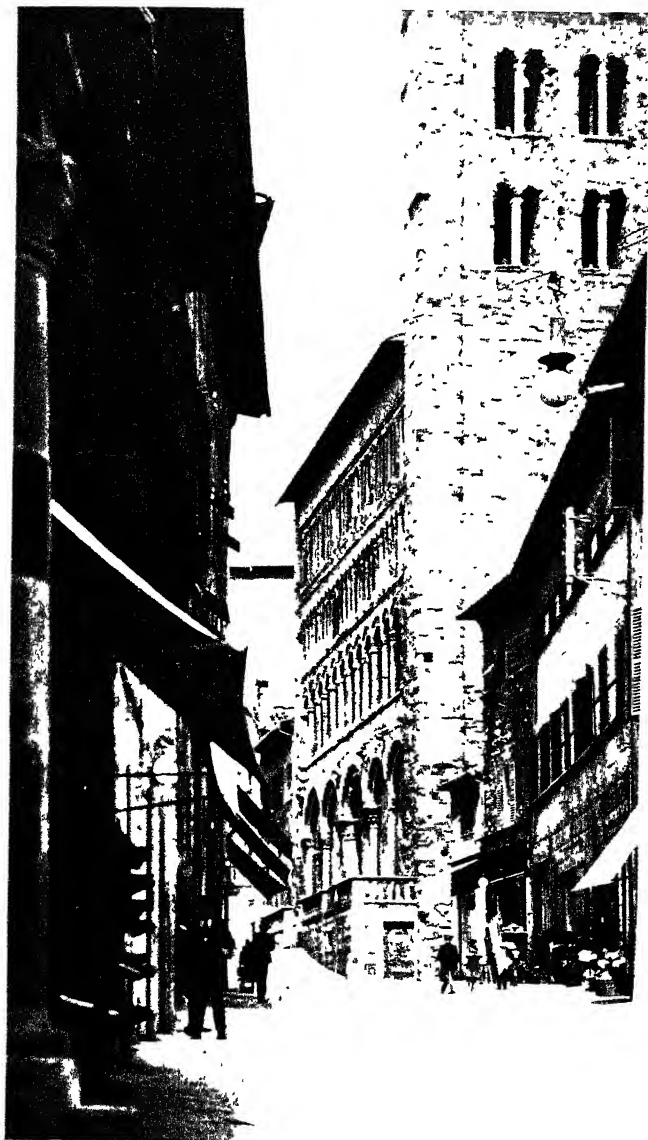
VERY early on the morning of Saturday, February 22nd, long indeed before "lauds," or before a streak of dawn had appeared in the skies, there was some commotion in the New Prisons in the Via Giulia. Franceschini and his companions had been informed that their appeal had been refused, and that they were to be put to death that very day.

To Count Guido the announcement was utterly unexpected. He was at first dazed and stupefied, but after a moment he said :

"I feared a heavy sentence, but not the sentence of death."

The few curious folk who had gathered around the prison door saw in the dark the Cardinal Acciaiuoli and the Abate Panciatichi arrive, saw them silently admitted, and the door close behind them. They had come to administer the last consolations of the Church to these five who were now entering the valley of the shadow of death. Men passing in boats down the Tiber saw unwonted lights in the prison and guessed the reason of them.

In the meantime the Piazza del Popolo was the scene of extraordinary activity. By the fluttering light of many lanterns men were erecting a scaffold in the centre of the piazza. The scaffold was lofty, and the



35.—THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA PIEVE,  
AREZZO.

Caponsacchi's church.



## The Execution in the Piazza del Popolo

steps that led to its high platform were steep. Up this stair two men, illumined by eager lantern-bearers, were staggering under a heavy burden. It was the headsman's block, and its disposal on the scaffold was the subject of much comment and possibly of some coarse jesting. On either side of the *mannaia* was a gallows, from the cross beams of which two ropes, with a noose at the end of each, were dangling. The countryman coming in through the gate with his cattle need not be told that five men were to die that day. It was with dumb amazement that these early-comers viewed the piazza. The place at night was generally as silent as a glen in the Campagna, and was a spot where both the sheep and their shepherds could sleep until it was light enough to make for the market-place of Rome.

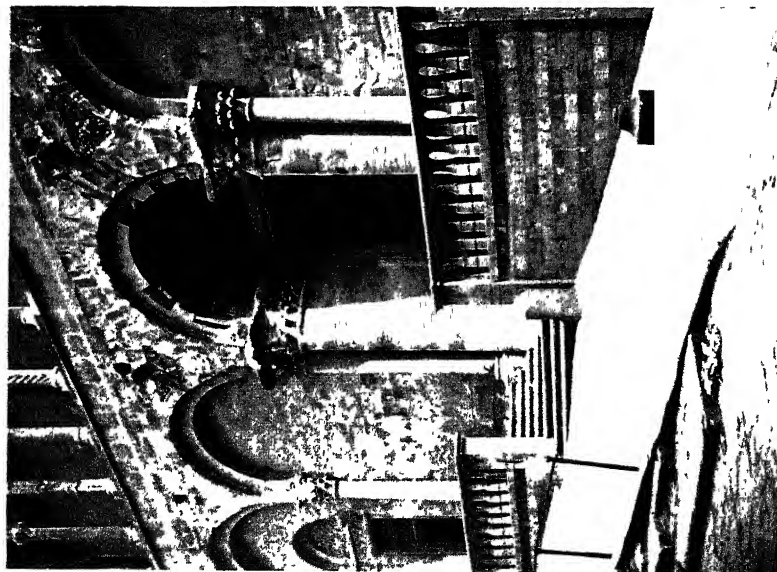
In the piazza itself people were busy putting up stands for those who would witness the spectacle. "In spite of the vastness of the piazza, not a single foot was left which was not occupied by stands, which were covered with tapestry and other ornaments forming a theatre for festal celebrations rather than for a solemn tragedy." Windows were already being thrown open and chairs placed in the rooms behind them. It is said that some windows brought as much as six scudi; that is to say, twenty-four shillings in modern currency.

As the day wore on, the crowd around the door of the jail in the Via Giulia increased until the street and lanes that led into it were blocked. As the hour drew near to two o'clock in the afternoon a hush fell upon the chattering crowd, and a company of police made a way through the mob for the dreadful Brotherhood of

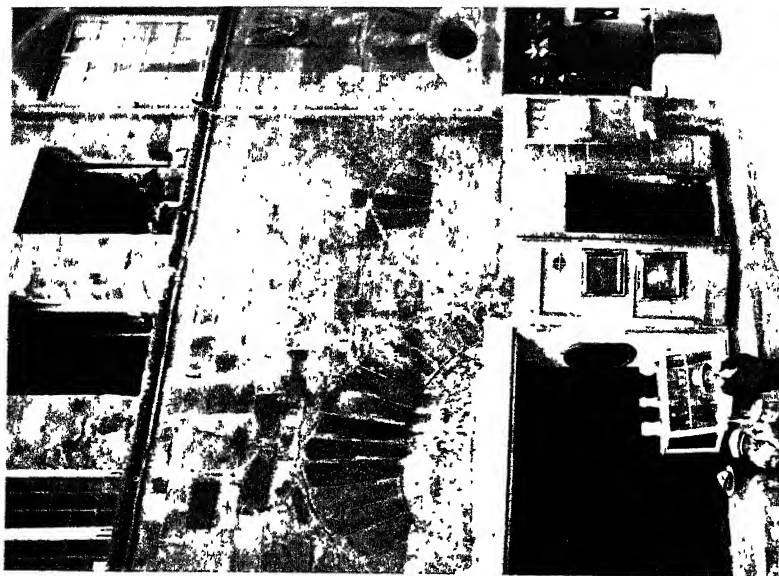
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Death. As these holy men marched with awful steps to the prison door a hum filled the street like the buzzing of a countless multitude of bees, a hum made up by whispers from a thousand lips, and by the shuffling of a thousand feet. Every hat would be removed as the posse of dark men passed by, men without faces, men above whose shoulders rose a black conical hood with holes for eyes that none could see. The one who led bore aloft a towering cross, upon which was stretched a Christ with open arms, while those who followed chanted with voices muffled in their hoods "the lamentable psalm," "Out of the depths, O Lord, have I cried unto Thee." Behind this doleful procession followed five common carts.

In a while the prisoners would issue one by one through the prison door, would give a startled look as the sudden light of the street dazzled them, and as they saw stretched out to right and left the pitiless morass of human faces. The first to mount the cart was Agostinelli, and the second who came was Gambassini. These were the two who kept watch while the murders were being done, and it was considered that of the five they were the least blameworthy. The third to step out into the light and climb into the cart was the lad Pasquini, for whom indulgence had been pleaded because of his age. He it was who owned that he had stabbed Pompilia in the back after her husband had done his worst upon her. The fourth to emerge was Baldeschi. He took his share in the stabbing, and was the oldest of the four who had come from Tuscany to help in the massacre. He it was who was so obstinate in his denial of guilt that he refused to confess until



36.—THE DOOR OF THE CHURCH OF  
SANTA MARIA DELLA PIEVE, AREZZO



37.—THE OLD CANALE INN, AREZZO.  
Now a Curiosity Shop.



## The Execution in the Piazza del Popolo

he had twice swooned under the terrible torture of "the cord." He it was who for so long declined the offices of the Church, "having a heart hardened by many years of evil life."

Last of all came Count Guido Franceschini, the most composed and the most intrepid of the five. He shunned the gaze of the crowd, for he kept his eyes fixed upon the crucifix he held in his hand. He wore the same garb as when he committed the crime, and presumably the same as when he set out from Arezzo. This clothing is described as composed of "a coat of brown cloth, a black shirt, a vest of goats'-hair, a white hat and cotton cap."

When all the carts were filled the procession started for the Piazza del Popolo. It was a long way to go. The route was by the Via del Pellegrino, the Via del Governo Vecchio, the Piazza Navona, the Piazza Colonna, where lived the female hairdresser, and the Corso. Before the end of the Corso was reached the procession would pass the Via Condotti, where the Abate Paolo resided, and the Via Vittoria, where all the trouble began and where it ended (see Maps of Rome, Plates 16 and 105).

In the Piazza Pasquino is the little church called the Church of the Agonizzanti. Here the procession halted, the five tumbrels, the company of hooded priests with their uplifted cross, and the unseemly rabble who by clinging to the sides of the carts had followed the dismal column through the narrow streets of the city.

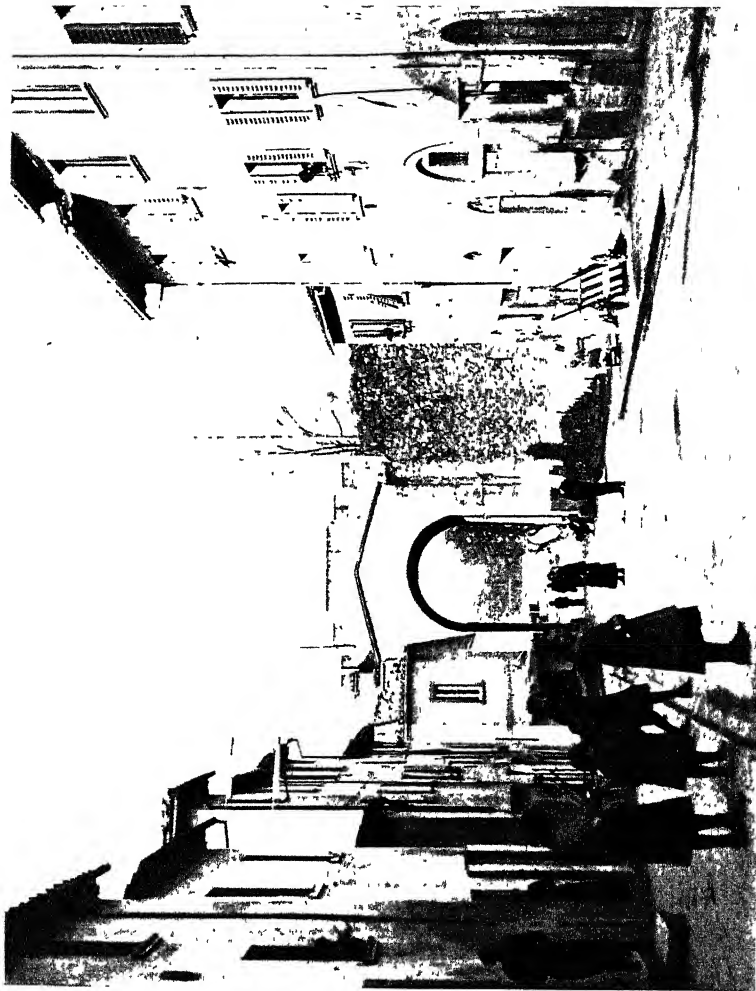
In this little square, according to the custom of the Church, the Last Sacrament was administered to the five men who were nearing the end of their last journey.



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

They received the Sacrament kneeling, and, according to the testimony of one who reported the occurrence, the people crowding the square or hanging out of every window that gave a view of the church were moved to tears.

The five criminals were executed in the order in which they left the prison. The first to die was Agostinelli by hanging, while the last was Count Guido, whose head was struck off by the executioner's axe. The final act in this dreadful tragedy was completed when the executioner held Guido's head aloft, gripping it by the hair, the sightless eyes being turned towards the open gate and the road that led to Tuscany.



38.—THE SAN CLEMENTE GATE, AREZZO.



## XVI

### THE EPILOGUE

AS the last of the five carts—each carrying a dead man—moved out of the Piazza del Popolo into the Corso, the story came to an end, and with the settling of the wintry night upon the now silent piazza the black curtain of oblivion fell upon this astonishing tragedy. Just for one moment, however, was the curtain raised again, and someone stepped out upon the empty stage to speak. He who spoke was one Antonio Lamparelli, Procurator of Charity. The purport of his speech was as follows, and it came as a very suitable epilogue to the drama.

There was in the Corso an ancient convent, founded in 1520, known as the Venerable Convent of Saint Mary Magdalen of the Convertites. The nuns, when the murder trial was over, laid claim to the whole of Pompilia's property on the ground of the right they possessed of acquiring the possessions of women of evil life who had died in Rome. The Procurator of the convent advanced the plea that the dead woman, Pompilia, had led an evil life, and that therefore such property as she possessed passed to the Order for whom he spoke. This demand was stoutly resisted by Domenico Tighetti, the heir beneficiary or executor of the little countess. The result was another lawsuit in which Tighetti was the plaintiff and the Fisc the defendant.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

It is interesting to note that the case was heard before Marco Antonio Venturini, the Vice-Governor of Rome, who had been the judge in the great murder trial just completed.

The whole story was gone over again from the beginning at Arezzo, when someone threw confetti into Pompilia's lap, to the end at Castelnuovo, when the two runaways were arrested and taken away to prison.

The result of the trial was a brilliant triumph for Pompilia; while at the same time the announcement of the judge's decision must have been received with reverent satisfaction by the lonely man who was in banishment at Civita Vecchia.

The Instrument of Final Judgment, as it was called, was delivered on September 9th, 1698, exactly five years, almost to the day, after Pompilia's marriage. It contained this declaration: "We say, pronounce, declare, and finally adjudge from what has been newly deduced, that proof is not established as regards the pretended adultery, and therefore the memory of Francesca Pompilia should be and is entirely restored to her pristine good name and reputation. And we charge that perpetual silence be imposed upon the Fisc and his consorts in the suit."

Throughout the whole of the Yellow Book, voluminous though it be, there are only two references to Pompilia's personal appearance. The lawyer, Bottini, who was the counsel for the prosecution in the murder trial, says this: She is "in the flower of her age, and, as I have heard, of no small reputation for beauty"; while Antonio Lamparelli, who utters this epilogue, speaks of her, with simple admiration, as "a beautiful woman."

## Part Two

### THE COUNTRY OF THE STORY



# I

## ROME

### 1. THE VIA VITTORIA

THE Via Vittoria—the home of the Comparini—is a little lane, long and straight, which runs from the north end of the Corso into the Via del Babuino. It is a street of mediæval Rome, and is yet in that part of the city which is best known to strangers, for it nearly reaches the Piazza di Spagna, which is the Leicester Square of modern Rome, where the Italian goes to study the foreigner (see Map of Rome, Plate 16).

The street is narrow, being only some 18 feet wide from wall to wall, while the road is paved in all its length like a courtyard (Plate 1). As the Via Vittoria lies east and west, and as its houses are lofty, it comes to pass that very little sun can penetrate into its deeper depths. In the winter, indeed, it lies in the shadow the whole day long. At such a time, to turn from the crowded Corso, dazzling with sun, into the quiet Via Vittoria, is like stepping into the aisle of an ancient church from the broad roadside.

The place is hushed. The atmosphere that fills it seems to be tinted, so that one would expect a white paper held in the hand to look brown. There is at such time night in the street but day in the sky, for the peaks of the roofs, the parapets and the chimneys are made golden by a blaze of sun which, here and there, cuts notches on the dark north walls. Where a



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

cross street strikes this lane of shadows a clear-cut sheet of sunlight will cross the road, like a plank of burnished metal laid over a dark stream. Even in the brilliant days of spring, the Via Vittoria seems to be a laggard street, hardly yet awake, but rather blinking like a drowsy owl in a niche away from the glare of noon.

The houses are for the most part drab, flat and uninteresting. As a piece of affectation, the windows are as lavishly provided with sun-shutters as if both rows of houses stood on a blinding beach, instead of forming the side of a deep brick and plaster trench. The present houses do not differ greatly from the humbler dwelling houses of Rome in Pompilia's time. This may be gathered to some extent from Vasi's prints (Plates 4 and 22), but with greater precision from certain detailed drawings of Rome at the commencement of the eighteenth century to be found in La Galleria Nazionale (Palazzo Corsini).\*

It will be noted that the older houses were lower, and possessed, as a rule, only two storeys, that they had sloping, red-tiled roofs, the eaves of which hung well over the house wall, that many of the windows had a rounded arch in place of being square, and that sun-shutters were unknown. There are only a few old houses still in the Via Vittoria with which Pompilia must have been familiar. One, indeed, is only of two storeys, and has the overhanging roof of earlier days (Plate 2). These old houses have arched doorways of stone, supported very often on either side by pilasters of no small pretence. Some will have within a stone staircase, while at the end of the passage may possibly

\* Note, for example, drawings Nos. 151, 152 and 1,035.



39.—THE CITY WALL, AREZZO, JUST INSIDE THE SAN CLEMENTE GATE,  
Showing the Hill of the Torrione.



## The Via Vittoria

be a glimpse of an ornamental court, or of a tiny garden. There are fine iron fanlights over a few of the doorways, and certain of the lower windows are barred with very lusty metal work.

There remains one charming feature about the Via Vittoria which must have been a delight to its inhabitants even long ago. High above the east end of the street there rises, in the gap of sky between the housetops, the crown of the Pincian Hill, covered with trees, and looking—at a distance—like a great green bush. At the time that the Comparini lived in Rome this height was occupied by a kitchen garden, owned by the monks of Santa Maria del Popolo.\*

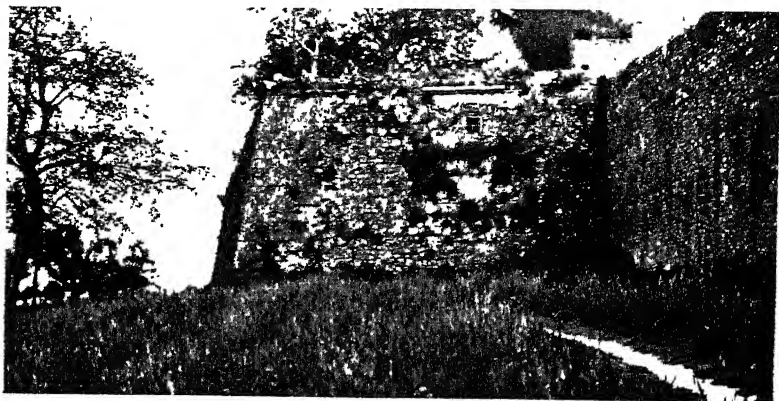
It is evident that the Via Vittoria has seen better days, and that it was, at one time, quite a fashionable, well-to-do street, holding its head high in the world. Some of the houses are so large as to be almost mansions. One of the most notable of these has a marble tablet in the wall to commemorate the fact that the great Garibaldi once lived under its roof. The residents in the quarter are now humbler folk, who hang mattresses out of the upper windows when any sun comes their way. They themselves hang out of window on occasion and converse with neighbours who in like manner project into the street. There are shops in the lane. These, although very small, meet the demands of varied tastes. There is a provision shop exhibiting hams and bladders of lard, a shop also for the sale of charcoal—a mere cellar entry—kept by a man as black as his goods, a shoemaker's

\* "La Corte e la Societa Romana nei XVIII. e XIX. secoli." By Signor Silvagni. Translated by F. Maclaughlin, London, 1885. The same fact is noted also in the Diary of John Evelyn, who was in Rome in 1644.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

shop, a chairmaker's, an emporium for seals and rubber stamps, as well as a place where the housewife can buy feather brushes and string. Probably such shops as these did not exist when Pompilia lived in Rome, but there is an ancient-looking wine shop in the street, where "choice wines of Frascati" are to be obtained, which might have been known to Pietro Comparini, who was, it will be remembered, "a frequenter of taverns."

The street being quiet and shady, and little troubled by traffic, is a favourite haunt of children, and it may be assumed that it was no less pleasant a playground when Pompilia was a little girl. During the carnival I came upon a party of boys—three in number—who were holding quite a festa in the Via Vittoria. They were squatting in the road playing cards. To give the gathering a proper convivial dignity, they had stuck four paper flags between the paving stones, and within the square thus distinguished the game was proceeding. Four oranges placed on the ground within the flags provided the suggestion of *bons viveurs* taking their ease after a banquet. The game apparently required four players, and as the number of boys was limited to three, a small girl had been drawn in to make the fourth. She sat on a newspaper, spread, courtier fashion, on the bare road, seemed very shy and meek, and was treated by the boys with marked condescension. She was so pretty and so plaintive-looking that she might have been Pompilia as she would have appeared some few years before she became a countess.



40.—THE TOWN WALL OF AREZZO, FROM THE OUTSIDE,  
Showing the base of the Torrione.



41.—THE WALL OF AREZZO BY THE TORRIONE,  
Over which Pompilia and Caponsacchi climbed in their escape.



## 2. THE HOUSE OF THE COMPARINI

THE house in which Pietro and Violante Comparini lived was at the corner of the Via Vittoria and the Via del Babuino. This is made evident by the following facts. When the Comparini first appear upon the scene they are described as living in the Via Vittoria. In the notification of their deaths in the registry of San Lorenzo in Lucina it is written that "they died of sundry wounds in the house where they were living in the Strada Paolina" (see the copy of the Register at the end of this volume). At the end of the seventeenth century the Via del Babuino was known as the Strada Paolina. Pompilia's letter to her father, written from the prison in Castelnuovo in the May preceding her death, was addressed to Signor Pietro Comparini, Via Vittoria, Rome. That the house occupied was the same from the beginning of the story to the end is made evident by a passage from the Yellow Book. The writer is speaking of the rupture with the Franceschini at Arezzo and of the return of the old couple to Rome. He says, "When Pietro and his wife decided to return to Rome they were provided with money for the journey, and in Rome with furniture to put in order *the house they had left.*"

At which corner at the end of the street the house stood it is impossible to say, while, unhappily for those



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

who are interested in the place where Pompilia spent her childhood, both the corner houses have been quite recently rebuilt. They are now represented by modern shops highly esteemed by tourists, for this end of the Via Vittoria thrusts itself into the very heart of the tourist quarter. The shops are devoted to the sale of bronze figures on the one hand, and of marble statuettes on the other, so that the traveller who lingers by the plate glass window, hesitating whether he should buy a bronze copy of the Dying Gladiator, or a replica in marble of the Capitoline Venus, may be standing on the very spot where Agostinelli and Gambassini kept guard while Guido, dagger in hand, crept up to the door and knocked.

The Via del Babuino, or Strada Paolina, may be regarded as the "High Street" of the foreign quarter. It connects the Piazza del Popolo with the Piazza di Spagna. It is a street of considerable interest. The name Via del Babuino, or Street of the Baboon, is derived from the circumstance that half-way down the road\* there was, until recently, a fountain with the mutilated figure of a satyr on it. To this statue, the people of Rome—with reckless views upon natural history—gave the name of "Il Babuino," the Baboon.

"Baboon Street" was undoubtedly the popular name of the causeway, and, in the guide-books of the time, it is so called. One of the most interesting "Guides" to Rome, published in the latter part of the seventeenth century, is that by Signor Martinelli, who is at pains to describe only "what he has seen with his own eyes" and who bases his book upon a plan which enables the tourist to

\*The position of the figure is shown in Falda's Plan, Plate 106.

## The House of the Comparini

see all the sights of Rome in eleven days.\* He places the Via del Babuino in his list of "strade principali," although Silvagni, in his account of the Eternal City at this period, declares that "The Via Babuino was about as mean and squalid a street as there was in Rome." The names of Roman streets were constantly being changed—an inconvenient habit, with which but a slight study of the older descriptions of the city will make the reader familiar. The name Strada Paolina was the official title of this particular road, as is rendered manifest by the maps and plans of the period.

The most valuable and interesting map of Rome dealing with the time of the Franceschini story is that drawn by Antonio Tempesta and "newly engraved, enlarged, embellished and brought up to date by Giacomo de Rossi." This map, enlivened with colours, is about ten feet long and four feet wide. It was published in 1664. It is rather a bird's-eye view of the Rome of the day than a mere plan. It reproduces the details of all the chief buildings and gives some idea of the general aspect of the streets. The street in question is the "Strada Paulina," while the exact position of "Il Babuino" is clearly marked. The houses in the Via Vittoria are represented as comparatively humble, while it is shown that at the backs of the houses were courtyards and gardens, and it is to be inferred that the larger of these courts were common to the houses that abutted upon them. At the time of the murder on January 2nd, it is told in the Yellow Book how Pompilia, hoping to escape the assassins, extinguished the light "and ran to the neighbouring door of a locksmith, crying out for

\* "Roma." By Signor Fioravante Martinelli. Padua, 1650.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

help." Now as the front of the house was swarming with the bravoës, and as escape in that direction was impossible, it must be that the locksmith's door opened into one of those common courtyards at the backs of the houses, which the map so clearly shows. De Rossi's fine drawing indeed makes this somewhat obscure episode in the account of the tragedy perfectly intelligible (this is made clear also in Falda's map reproduced in Plate 106).

Tempesta's and Falda's maps demonstrate that, at the time of their making, the well-known Spanish Steps rising out of the Piazza di Spagna did not exist.\* In their place was a mound or slope dotted with trees and intersected by winding paths, having at its foot the ridiculous ship fountain, and on its summit the Santissima Trinita de'Monti (see Falda's map, Plate 106). The Piazza di Spagna does not figure in the story of Pompilia, although Browning describes Pietro, "periwig on head and cane in hand," strolling into the square, "toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge," in order to inquire of the gossips what they knew of his wife's noble friend, Count Guido Franceschini.

Falda's plan further shows the convent of Santa Maria Maddalena delle Convertite. It will be remembered that this religious body laid claim to Pompilia's property after her death (p. 93). The building has long since been pulled down. It stood in the Corso, occupying the whole of the area between the Via delle Convertite and the Via S. Claudio. As will be seen from the plan, the chapel of the convent was in the Corso, while two courtyards and a garden were enclosed by the very extensive conventual buildings.

\* The Scala di Spagna, with its 137 steps, was constructed in 1721-25.



#### 42.—THE COUNTRY BETWEEN AREZZO AND ROME.

The Route taken by Pcmpilia in her flight is shown thus—



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

be gathered from Vasi's print (Plate 4). It is the Corso as Pompilia knew it. It shows that part of the great highway which must have been especially familiar to the Comparini, since it lies between the Via Vittoria and the parish church of San Lorenzo in Lucina. The raised sidewalk for foot passengers—now no longer existing—will be noticed. There is little doubt that it was along this path, lifted well out of the mud, that Pompilia and her mother walked on their return from the wedding. The street in the extreme left-hand corner of the plate is the Via Condotti, where the Abate Paolo lived, while the turning just beyond the palace leads, on the other side of the road, to the church above named, where Pompilia was married. Two streets only separated the Via Condotti from the Via Vittoria.

Silvagni, in his account of Rome in the eighteenth century, writes in this manner: "The streets were without names, the houses without numbers, the roofs without gutters and the shop windows without glass. There were no foot pavements, no lamps, no names over the tradespeople's premises. Iron or wooden signboards, typical of the business carried on within, hung, however, at the doors of the shops. . . . There were huge open drains full of filth and nastiness of every kind running down the middle of most of the streets, the Corso included. As an exception to the general rule, the Corso had a side-walk for foot passengers raised above the roadway all along it."\*

\* "Rome. Its Princes, Priests and People." A translation by Fanny Maclaughlin of Signor Silvagni's "*La Corte e la Societa Romana nei XVIII e XIX secoli*." London, 1885. Vol. I., p. 6.



43.—VITIANO, WHENCE CAME THE FOUR BRAVOES.



44.—A TYPICAL WAYSIDE COTTAGE ON THE ROUTE  
OF POMPILIA'S FLIGHT.





## The Neighbourhood of the Via Vittoria

Except for the artistic omission of the open drain, Vasi's print well bears out this description.

That cheerful and most facetious traveller, M. de Brosse, visited Rome in 1739 or 1740 and lodged in the Piazza di Spagna. He states that even at that time only one-third of the city of Rome was really inhabited, viz. the quarter between the Tiber, the Monte della Trinità, the Monte Cavallo and the Capitol. "All the rest," he says, "consists of gardens, fields, huge buildings, ruins, and a few sparsely populated streets here and there."\* There were no quays along the river sides, while the Villa Borghese is described as in the country. He estimates the population of Rome at 50,000. It is now 500,000.

The Earl of Perth, who was resident in Rome just two years before Guido's execution, was also much impressed with the poverty of the city. He lived on the Pincio, and had close acquaintance with that very Pope, Innocent XII., who signed Guido's death warrant. "The Pope," he writes, "is a very handsome old man as ever I saw . . . he's a worthy good old man; he's of great quality and has the manner of it; he's now eighty years and four months, yet very vigorous." †

Venuti's famous drawings of Rome in the early part of the eighteenth century show the city to be untidy and disordered, covered with ruins and weeds, with heaps of stones, earth and rubbish, while market booths, huts

\* "Letters of de Brosse." Translated by Lord Ronald Gower. London, 1897.

† "Letters of James, Earl of Perth." London, Camden Society, 1845.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

and hovels were planted in any piazza, however magnificent.\*

Venuti, indeed, depicts Rome as a squalid and sombre city, neglected and uncared for; and to this picture the written accounts of the time add details which serve only to deepen the shadows—details as to the lawlessness of a place where no young woman could walk abroad without protection, and where in every filthy by-way after dark it was safe to assume that a footpad or two were hiding.

On the other hand, there was at this time a great deal in Rome that was magnificent, besides its ancient monuments and vast ruins, and many pleasant places which were neither squalid nor uncared for. This may be gathered from the chatty accounts in the famous Diary of John Evelyn. John Evelyn reached Rome on the 4th of November, 1644, "about five at night," wet to the skin and on horseback. He found a lodging, as most English travellers did, near the Piazza di Spagna.

He remained in Rome nearly three months, during which time he took "some lessons on the theorbo." He was much impressed by many of the mansions and villas, and especially with the gardens. "The garden," he writes, "which is called the Belvedere di Monte Cavallo is most excellent for air and prospect; its exquisite fountains, close walks, grots, piscinas, or stews for fish, planted about with venerable cypresses and refreshed with water music, aviaries and other rarities." He found the Villa Borghese, with its "baluster of white marble with frequent jettos of water," exceedingly noble,

\* "Descrizione Topografica delle Antichità di Roma." By R. Venuti. Rome, 1763.



45.—CASTIGLIONE FIORENTINO.  
On the Route of Flight.



## The Neighbourhood of the Via Vittoria

and the garden, with "all sorts of delicious fruit and exotic simples, fountains of sundry inventions . . . and a volary full of curious birds, an elysium of delight."

The Ruspoli Palace, shown in Vasi's print (Plate 4), was built in 1586, and still stands in the Corso. It would have been very familiar to Pompilia. It once belonged to the Cætani. It will be noticed that the central entrance of the mansion is walled up. It was in this entry that one of the Cætani was stabbed to death by a member of the Orsini family, whereupon the order was given that the great door should be closed for ever. The palace is no longer palatial looking, and, massive as it is, it is no longer even dignified. The windows have been modernised, and the stately rooms given up to offices. Indeed, when I last passed the palace it was in part devoted to a cinematograph show, while the walls about the spot where the young Cætani fell were flaming with posters representing a woman, with very clenched teeth, jumping out of the carriage of an express train.

The Via Condotti, or Conduit Street, leads from the Corso to the Piazza di Spagna. In it stands the House of the Order of the Knights of Malta. If one can judge from the gorgeousness of the porter at the gate, the Order is still wealthy and flourishing. The building is of considerable size, but although it has been modernised, it probably conforms in its general outlines with the chapter house of two centuries ago. A fine archway leads into a little courtyard, an exquisite tiny cloister-garth, brilliant with flowers, draped with green creepers, and shaded in one corner by a comely pepper tree. Against one white wall is a fountain basin, and above this little pool, on a shield of crimson, is emblazoned the

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Maltese cross (Plate 7). Guido's brother, the Abate Paolo Franceschini, was appointed secretary to this ancient Order in 1693, and in this stately building most assuredly he dwelt. It may be surmised that his window looked into this little green courtyard, and that his evil-plotting brain was lulled by the sound of water dripping in the fountain, and that the sweet quietude and happy innocence of the spot so jarred with his black and bloody thoughts as to impel him to flee from Rome for ever.

#### 4. THE STREET OF THE LION'S MOUTH

TURNING out of the Via Vittoria is a street called the Via Bocca di Leone. It is wider than the Via Vittoria, and a street of greater pretension, for it contains many fine old town houses with handsome doorways, heavily barred windows and dignified courtyards. It was never a mean street. Indeed, some two hundred years ago it must have given quite an aristocratic bearing to the quarter and have echoed with the rumble of gilded carriages and the laughter of gaily dressed people. It was down this street that Browning makes Pompilia hurry on her way to the church on that dismal evening, howling with rain, when—according to his statement—she was married. The lane, indeed, would be the shortest way from the Comparini house to San Lorenzo in Lucina.

The street, however, has another interest. At that end of it which is the nearer to the Via Vittoria is a large, heavy, neglected-looking house of five storeys. But for its sun-shutters it is no more than a gross, featureless barrack. It has on one corner, it is true, a picture of the Virgin and a lamp, but below the painting is a coarsely lettered board announcing cabs for hire, while the slip of a lane at the side has the savage name of Wolf Alley.

In this forbidding house, at the corner of Wolf Alley, Robert Browning and his wife once lived. The fact is

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

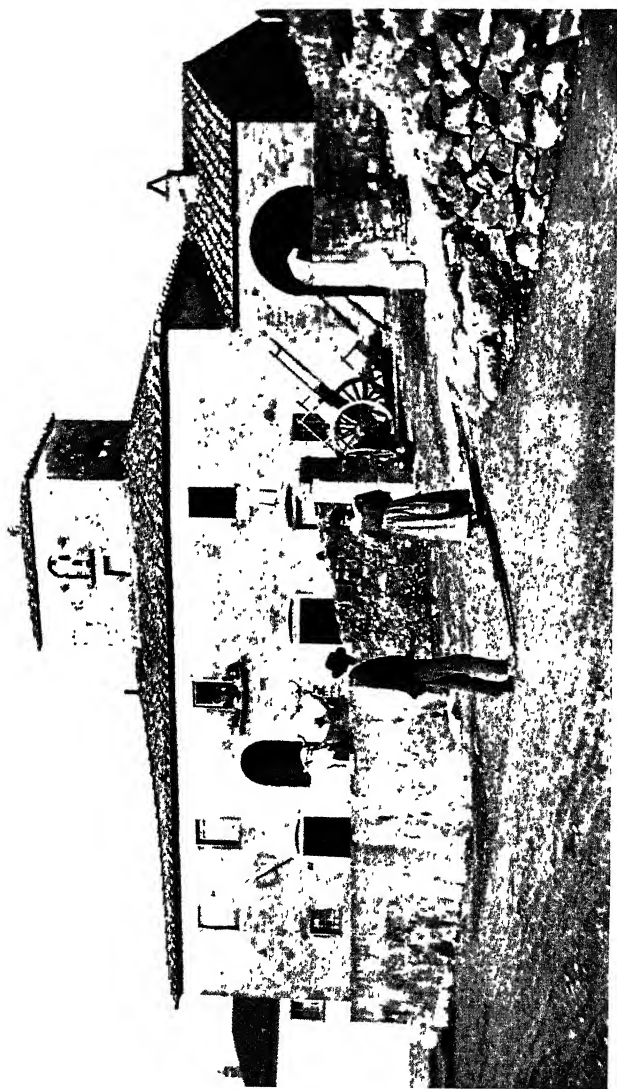
commemorated by a marble tablet on the wall, between the picture of the Virgin and the cab proprietor's board. The tablet was erected by the Municipality of Rome on the centenary of the poet's birth, May 7th, 1912, while beneath it—as can be seen in the photograph (Plate 3)—some kindly soul has hung a handsome wreath of evergreens. The house is old, as is evident from its well-weathered doorway in the Via Bocca di Leone. Above this entry is a venerable stone shield with the inscription *DOMUS FRANCISI BARAZZI. LIBERA*. Possibly Pompilia puzzled over this in her many walks down the street on the way to the Corso. The home of Francis Barazzi has fallen upon humbler days, for on the ground floor an upholsterer struggles with the cab proprietor for an existence.

The Brownings first occupied this house in the winter of 1854. Their rooms were on the third floor, and, as Mrs. Browning writes, were "turned to the sun."\* They were, therefore, on that corner of the house which is shown in the photograph, the view having been taken in the winter. Apparently the last occasion on which the Brownings resided in Rome was in the winter of 1859, when a letter of Mrs. Browning shows that, for at least some part of their visit, they had their quarters in the same house in the Via Bocca di Leone.† The old Yellow Book came into Browning's hands in June, 1860, and apparently he was never again in Rome after that date. He, therefore, had no opportunity of seeking out the various spots connected with

\* "Life of Robert Browning." By Mrs. Sutherland Orr, London, 1891, p. 197.

† "Life of Robert Browning." By W. Hall Griffin, London, 1910, p. 214.





46.—OLD HOUSE AT CAMOSCIA.



## The Street of the Lion's Mouth

the story he was destined to make famous. It is curious that he should have chosen his home in that quarter of the city around which the drama centred, for No. 43 Via Bocca di Leone was only but a few steps from the house where the crafty Violante lived and where Pompilia died.

## 5. THE URSULINE CONVENT

THERE is in the Via Vittoria a large motherly building of such ample proportions that it actually overpowers the tiny street, and seems prepared to gather it, together with all its houses, shops and people, under the shadow of its wings (Plate 1). This is the Accademia di S. Cecilia, once a famous Ursuline convent. It is a somewhat ostentatious house, with a doorway worthy of a church and with heavily barred windows on the ground floor. It has been in part modernised of late, but with seemingly so little disturbance that the Comparini, if they could once more walk the streets of Rome, would recognise it as the Ursuline convent of their day. When it ceased to be an Ursuline convent I cannot ascertain. It has nothing to do with the Franceschini tragedy, but there is a story connected with the house which bears so strange a resemblance to Pompilia's adventure that it is worth the telling.

The story of the convent concerns a young girl, not yet twenty, who was married in 1772 to a man of fifty-two, whom she saw for the first time on the day that she married him. The wedding, which took place in the north of Italy, had, like Pompilia's marriage, been "arranged." The bride and bridegroom resided for a time in Rome. They then moved northwards, not to Arezzo but to Florence, where they were living in 1781. The husband, although his name was not



47.—THE WALLS OF CORTONA.



## The Ursuline Convent

Guido, was a degraded brute, who treated his young wife with such cruelty that her health was undermined and her life put in danger. He is described as a gaunt man, with a bent back, a purple face, flabby cheeks and watery eyes. He was gloomy, maudlin, foul-mouthed and generally loathsome, for he was a confirmed drunkard. The wife, on the other hand, is said to have been pretty and dainty, with golden hair and dark blue eyes. She was "a childish woman of the world, a bright, light handful of thistle-bloom" who fascinated everyone. Not the least interesting thing about her was the fact that she signed her name "Louise R," which meant Louise, Queen of Great Britain, France and Ireland. Her husband was no other than Charles Edward Stuart, the "Young Pretender," the "Bonnie Prince Charlie" of a hundred wild adventures, and the adored of the gallant Flora Macdonald. He styled himself Charles III. of England, while competent writers of the time styled him "a brutal sot." His wife appeared, on the other hand, to be content with the title of Countess of Albany.

Louise, finding her days intolerable and her life in jeopardy, resolved to flee away to Rome. She was helped in her flight, not by a young priest, but by a young poet. His name was Vittorio Alfieri, aged twenty-eight, "an unorganised mass of passions" and the author, in due course, of twenty-one tragedies and six comedies. Louise and her poet did not fly to Rome alone. She was accompanied in this passage by a lady of her household and two maids, while the writer of tragedies and a friend, armed and dressed as servants, accompanied the carriage a great part of the way. This was in January,

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

1781.\* From a study of the roads at this period, it seems probable that they came by Arezzo and Assisi, and, indeed, followed the same highway as that traversed by Pompilia and Caponsacchi. Her husband might have pursued and caught her before she reached the gates of Rome, but he was too constantly drunk for so strenuous a chase. If the Countess of Albany stayed to change horses at Castelnuovo—as she must have done if she came by the Flaminian Road—she might have listened to some faint, half legendary account of the flight of the other countess and of how her husband had ridden up to the inn at the break of dawn, and of how she and her companion were led away to the prison in the little town near by. It was curious that both the Countess Louise and the Countess Pompilia should have had the Via Vittoria as their haven of refuge in Rome.

Charles Edward Stuart, unlike Guido, did not personally undertake any wholesale slaughter in connection with his wife's elopement, but he made it known that he was prepared to give 1,000 sequins (nearly £500) to anyone who would murder Alfieri.

In the spring of 1781 Alfieri followed his lady to Rome, and went at once to the Ursuline convent in the Via Vittoria. He was of course not admitted, but he saw the countess at the window, and, no doubt to the extreme horror of the nuns, spoke to her through the heavy iron grille which makes those windows so suggestive of a prison. He was a neurotic and hysterical man, a very self-conscious poseur, who

\* "The Countess of Albany." By Vernon Lee. London, 1884. This book gives a brilliant and vivid account of the adventures of Louise, who was, however, more generally known as the Countess of Albany.



## The Ursuline Convent

expressed his emotions with inane exaggeration and intenseness. It may be assumed that his visit to the convent caused a giggling crowd to collect in the Via Vittoria. Of the painful interview, he writes as follows : " I saw her, but (O God ! my heart seems to break at the mere recollection) I saw her a prisoner behind a grating, less tormented than in Florence, but yet not less unhappy."

There is every reason to suppose that the grille with which each ground floor window is still barred belongs to a time before 1781, while it remains for the imagination of the passer-by to select the particular trellis of iron to which the blubbering Alfieri clung in such despair.

## 6. SAN LORENZO IN LUCINA

**I**N a quiet, insignificant piazza, leading out of the Corso—the great thoroughfare of Rome—is the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, where Pompilia was baptised, where she was married, and where her body lay after her death. Here, too, she was buried. San Lorenzo is the church of an important parish within whose confines lie the Via Vittoria and much of the quarter about the Piazza di Spagna. The piazza in Lucina is small, oddly shaped and very still. It is a favourite place for the lounge, since it forms a placid backwater to the rushing stream of the Corso, which eddies noisily by this diffident retreat. The houses are of that unobtrusive type which attract no attention and leave on the mind only a general impression of dwellings.

The church occupies the south side of the piazza. It is small, humble and self-effacing, being, indeed, one of the most modest of the churches of Rome. It seems to be attempting to withdraw from the bustling world and to hide itself among the adjacent houses. In this attempt it has succeeded, for only one wall of the building is visible. From somewhere among the houses around rises a haughty campanile, with four pillared storeys, built of faded brick and very ancient looking, for it belongs to the thirteenth century. It appears to be anxious to disclaim any connection with the unpretending church.



48.—A STREET IN CORTONA.



## San Lorenzo in Lucina

That portion of San Lorenzo which is visible would—if the buildings were correctly oriented—correspond to the west end of an English church. This façade is very plain, being covered with a dingy yellow plaster, and suggests an impoverished meeting-house rather than a church which was founded in the sixth century and was rebuilt in the present form in 1606 (Plate 5).

In the entrance is a porch or loggia, dark and vault-like, and always full of shadow. It is separated from the sunlit pavement by four simple pillars of granite. The spaces between the columns are occupied by an iron grille, in the centre of which is a plain iron gate. The entry to the guard-room of a barrack could not be more severe. The loggia is cool, and, so long as the gate is open, people sleep there on warm mornings. There are some very ancient tablets on the walls, with such dates as Anno Dni MCXII. and MCXXX., while a modern inscription shows to what height the water reached in the portico during the flood of December, 28th, 1870. The floor is paved with tombstones from wall to wall, for the porch is a place of sleep for both the living and the dead. Some of those who lie here belong to the Rome of centuries ago, since one slab, on which is carved a coat of arms, bears the date of the year 1462.

On this stone pavement, on either side of the wooden door of the church itself, is a marble lion. The lions are about two feet high, are very old and very dirty, except where their heads have been pawed smooth by passing children. They appear to be emerging from the wall, since only the heads and the shoulders of the beasts are in evidence. Their venerable aspect is due

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to the fact that they have been crouching on this pavement for some seven hundred years. They have watched a great multitude of people enter this church, from the thirteenth century gallant with cloak and dagger, to the twentieth century tourist with guide book and camera.

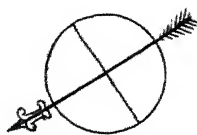
The lion to the right of the door has a singularly benevolent and even fatuous expression, while between his feet is a manikin, clad only in a loin cloth, who is affectionately stroking the amiable creature's mane (Plate 6). The lion to the left, on the contrary, is snarling, and has an aspect of extreme ferocity. Between his forepaws is an animal, apparently a dog, but obscure as to its exact species by the accident of being headless.

Lions of this kind are not uncommonly found sitting at the doors of ancient churches. A pair, for example, guard the entrance to the duomo at Civita Castellana, while two like them crouch before the beautiful door of San Feliziano at Foligno. They are intended to symbolise the kindly protection that the Church affords to the believer, on the one hand, and the ferocity with which it deals with the dog-like heretic, on the other.

In the "Ring and the Book" Pompilia speaks about one of these lions in her musings over the Church of San Lorenzo:

"I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high  
As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,  
With half his body rushing from the wall,  
Eating the figure of a prostrate man—  
To the right, it is, of entry by the door."

It may be gathered from this account that Browning never saw these lions, or that he made confusion between the two. The fact that he knew little or nothing of

[illegible]

49.—POSTING-ROAD MAP FROM AREZZO TO FOLIGNO BY ASSISI.

From "The Love of Italy" Bologna, 1771.





## San Lorenzo in Lucina

the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina may be inferred from the following letter written by him to Frederic Leighton :

"Oct. 17, 1864. A favour, if you have time for it. Go into the Church St. Lorenzo in Lucina in the Corso—and look attentively at it, so as to describe it to me on your return. The general arrangement of the building, if with a nave—pillars or not—the number of altars, and any peculiarity that may be—over the High Altar is a famous Crucifixion by Guido. It will be of great use to me. I don't care about the *outside*." \*

Leighton's description, when it came to be presented, evidently misled the poet on the matter of the lion. The great artist, moreover, must have paid little heed to "the general arrangement of the building," since he is probably answerable for Browning's reference to the aisle of the church, whereas the building has no aisle.

The interior of San Lorenzo is very agreeable to contemplate, owing to the delicacy of the colouring of the walls. The plan of the church is severely simple—a nave with, on either side, some little chapels, each lit through a dome in the roof. At noon, even on a winter's day, the sun slants into some of these tiny oratories, touching here the marble wall, here the paved floor and here the altar, and making each one of them brilliant and gorgeous, while the rest of the church remains in reverent shadow. The coffered ceiling of the nave is so beautifully decorated in gold and red and blue that it looks like a page from a missal, especially as, in the centre of the ceiling, is a picture of Christ.

The floor of the church is paved with black and

\* "Life of Robert Browning." By Mrs. Sutherland Orr. London, 1891, p. 284.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

white marble, laid in pronounced pattern. The walls owe their charm of colour to the marbles of manifold tints with which they are covered, and to the delicately painted panels. The whole produces a blithe atmosphere of grey, of pale blue and of warm yellow. The clerestory windows, by which the interior is lit, are draped with crimson curtains. Two steps lead up to the altar, in front of which is a balustrade of variegated marble. Here stood Guido and Pompilia on the fateful 6th of September, 1693; and here, too, lay the dead bodies of the old Comparini and of the little countess. Behind the handsome altar are four great pillars of dark grey marble, having in the centre the famous Crucifixion painted by Guido Reni.

One may well imagine, with the writer of "The Ring and the Book," that Pompilia had a great affection for this church. It is just such a church as would delight a child, being very bright and cheerful, undepressed by heavy, funereal monuments and adorned with wonderful gilt candlesticks and altar pictures. Moreover, there was the lion's head to pat whenever the church door was passed.

Under the gallery at the west end of San Lorenzo is a gilded frame, containing the "Pubblicazioni dei Matrimoni," with the names of the parties, their fathers and mothers, their places of origin and the dates on which the banns were announced. The frame is new, but it must have been somewhere on this old wall that the declaration of the marriage between Guido Franceschini of Arezzo and Pompilia Comparini of Rome, with all the necessary particulars, was made public.

Although the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina

## San Lorenzo in Lucina

contains little to attract the curious, yet it is mentioned very often in the narratives of early travellers. Father Montfaucon, who visited Rome in 1698 (the year of Pompilia's death and Guido's execution), speaks of the church, but not in an illuminating manner. He says that the part of Rome in which the church was situate "abounds everywhere with stately houses of princes and noblemen."\*

The genial M. de Brosse, who was lodging in the Piazza di Spagna in 1739, discovered that San Lorenzo was his parish church, and very properly considered that he should attend a service there. He thus describes his visit: "I have not been here (i.e. in the church) half a minute before I have had two handkerchiefs and my snuff-box stolen."†

I was anxious to see the register of San Lorenzo in Lucina, but found that all but the records of recent years had been removed to that vast Palazzo del Laterano which is attached to the still vaster Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano. The Record Room of the Archivio Generale del Vicariato is an old and very picturesque apartment, which, like everything else connected with the Lateran, is of great size. The walls, from the brick floor to the beautifully painted cove roof, are lined with the church registers of Rome, and a remarkable assemblage of ancient volumes they present, being, indeed, a vast library of "old yellow books." The archivist who has charge of this wondrous muniment room is a learned and most courteous priest, to

\* "The Travels of the Learned Father Montfaucon from Paris through Italy." London, 1712.

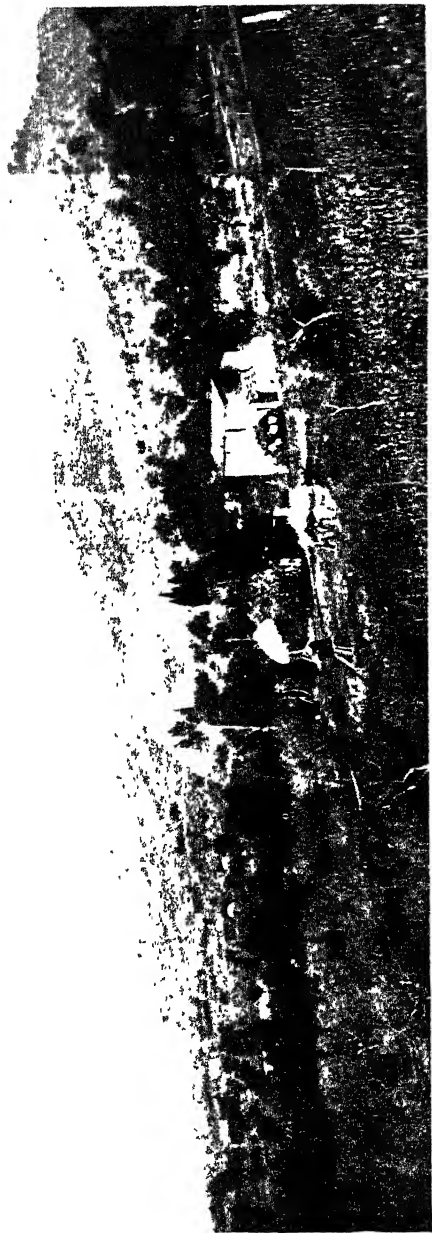
† "Letters of De Brosse." By Lord Ronald Gower. London, 1897, p. 158.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

whom I am under obligations. The ancient records of the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina are in three separate volumes, one dealing with baptisms, one with marriages and the third with deaths. The books are large and heavy volumes, about eighteen inches long by fifteen inches wide, covered with lemon-yellow parchment and fastened by four cords of cotton. They are unsoiled, and their perfect state of preservation is astonishing.

The paper of these books is grey and coarse. The writing is in the centre of the page, a margin being left on either side which is sometimes utilised for addenda to the entry. For example, in the record of Pompilia's baptism the names given her are entered in the margin as if they had not been supplied when the account of her baptism was written out. The ink in the three books is of a rich, brown colour, without a shadow of fading. The writing in the baptismal register is heavy, large, straggling and very difficult to read. One can imagine the priest who made the entries to have been a fat, careless, and untidy man, who was glad to get his clerical work over and take his ease. The writing in the registers of marriages and deaths is by one hand, but that not the hand of the loose-limbed curate. It is, on the contrary, a small, precise, scholarly script, very neat and plain to read. It suggests the handiwork of a thin, dapper, little man, who, if not a genius, was at least painstaking.

It is needless to say that no signatures are attached to any of these entries in the church registers. Certified copies of the various entries just named are given at the end of this volume.



50.—THE FRONTIER BETWEEN TUSCANY AND THE STATES OF THE CHURCH,  
NEAR TERONTOLA.



## San Lorenzo in Lucina

Although a wide search has been made, no record of the baptism of Pompilia's boy, Gætano, can be discovered. As the certificate at the end of this volume shows, a record of such baptism is not to be found in the registers of the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, nor in those of the churches of the six adjoining parishes. It was suggested that, in the circumstances under which the child was born, it was possible that the baptism had been carried out at St. Peter's, but the registers of that church show no entry of the kind.

## 7. LE SCALETTE

**A**FTER the affair at Castelnuovo, Pompilia and Caponsacchi were sent to Rome and lodged in the New Prisons. They stood their trial before the Criminal Court, and, after long wrangling among the lawyers, Pompilia was committed to a convent known to the people of Rome as "Le Scalette." Here she remained until October 12th, when she was allowed to return to the home of her foster parents in the Via Vittoria. Her stay in the convent does not appear to have been more than a month. The convent was an institution for women who had lived, and had repented of, an evil life. It is said to have been founded in 1615, when its full title was *Il Conservatorio di S. Croce della Penitenza*. It is situated across the river in the Via della Lungara, a street well known to diligent tourists, for it contains the Palazzo Corsini, which is one of the unavoidable sights of Rome. The popular name of "Le Scalette" or "The Little Stairways" is derived from the fact that in front of the building is a long and unusual platform, approached by a small stair at either end. On the platform are two doors, one leading into the chapel and the other to the Penitentiary. The essential part of the building, the façade that looks upon the street, the chapel itself, the platform and the little stairs are all unchanged, and, as Pompilia saw them long ago, so the traveller sees them now (Plate 8).





51. THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF LAKE TRASIMENE.  
Showing the Entrance into "The Defile."



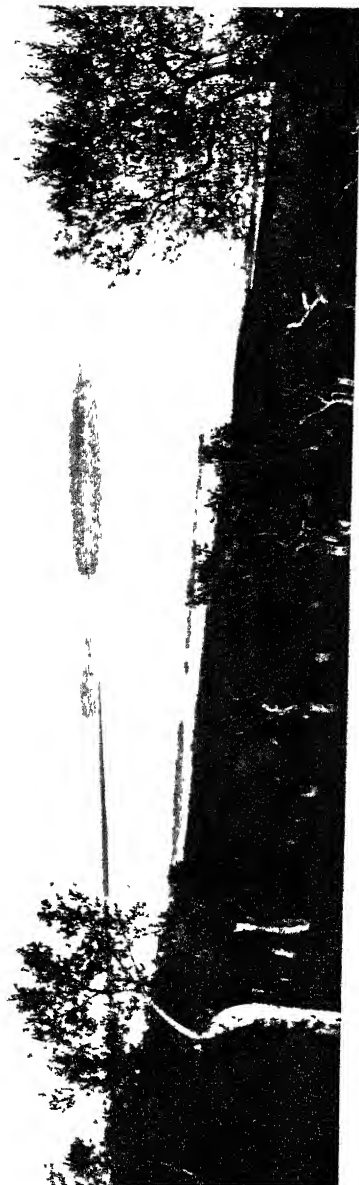
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

which lines the rift between the wooden sill and the stone step. Above the other door on the platform a great cross is fastened to the wall over the figure of the Good Shepherd. This door leads into a cavernous kind of guard-room, a grim, hard, uncharitable place which must have chilled Pompilia's heart as she stepped into its inhospitable gloom. It was a relief to see two placid and kindly-looking nuns come out of this apparently deserted place. All the convent windows are so strongly barred that they convey the impression of belonging to a prison, while at the back of the building is a garden shut in by a terrifying wall.

One morning in May, on walking to the Lungara, to ponder once again over the Scalette, I found, sitting on the steps of the chapel, one of the most fearful-looking human beings I have ever seen. He was a tramp, very old and wrinkled, unclean and disgusting. He was dressed darkly, in fantastic and unnatural rags that seemed to be parts of mediæval garments, and was crowned with a ridiculous hat more like a Quaker woman's bonnet (Plate 9).

It was not the dirt, not the tatters, nor the poverty of the man that made him horrible, but rather it was his attitude of the castaway, of the solitary, shipwrecked man, who had been left by the ebbing tide of the world upon these desert steps, a mere bit of sodden wreckage, and who was, nevertheless, garbed in such a motley as to be incongruously grotesque.

As he sat on the stone, a deformed, distorted bundle, tricked out as a mummer, he seemed something lower than a man. The bones of his shoulders and the bones of his bent knees protruded, with hard anatomical detail,



52.--LAKE TRASIMENE, FROM THE HIGH ROAD.  
Showing the Islands.



## Le Scalette

under the greasy polished cloth that covered them, and when he moved his head the profane absurdity of his hat was dreadful.

He could not have come to a more appropriate place in search of the sun; for he seemed to personify the lamentable hospitality of the building that sheltered him, as well as the world's disdain, the gibe of the Pharisee and the cynical pitilessness of time.

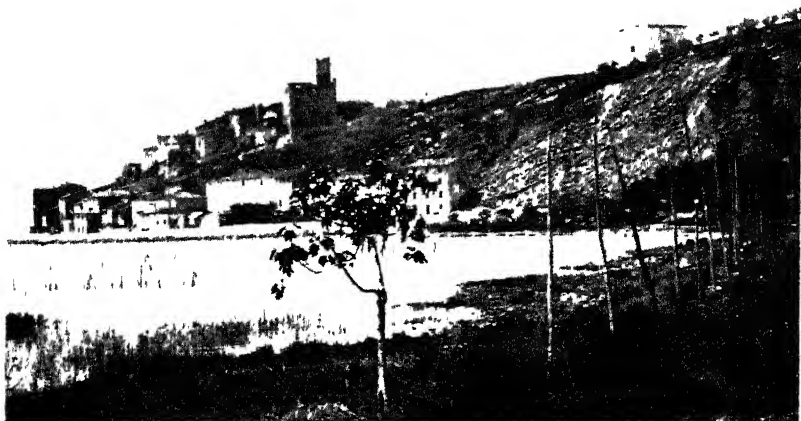
Impressions are often inappropriate and lacking in proportion, but while searching among the relics of the Yellow Book I experienced few impressions so haunting as that left by this forlorn, chimerical creature in human shape, who was leaning against the rotting door of the House of the Good Shepherd.

## 8. THE NEW PRISONS

THE great prisons of Rome at the time of the Franceschini tragedy were the Carceri Nuove, or New Prisons, in the Via Giulia. They replaced the prisons of the Torre di Nono, which stood on the bank of the river near the Ponte S. Angelo. The Carceri Nuove were founded by Pope Innocent X. and were erected in the year 1655 (see Plates 13 and 14).

To these new prisons Pompilia and Caponsacchi were brought, after their arrest at Castelnuovo, and here they were lodged during the summer of 1697, being prisoners in this great jail for nearly five months. To the Carceri Nuove also, on the 3rd of January, 1698, came Guido and his four associates, strapped to their horses and followed by a hooting mob. In this prison they lay until they were led out, one afternoon in February, to the place of execution in the Piazza del Popolo. To Innocent the Tenth's new building in the Via Giulia, therefore, great interest attaches.

Something, however, may be said about the Via Giulia itself, for it is, and ever has been, one of the picturesque streets in Rome. For a thoroughfare in the old part of the city it is comparatively wide; it is, moreover, of considerable length. It runs by the bank of the Tiber, and has been evidently a pompous, arrogant, purse-proud street, as well as the highway of an exceedingly fashionable quarter. It is lined with mansions that would



53.—PASSIGNANO, ON LAKE TRASIMENE.



54.—TUORO, FROM THE HIGH ROAD.





## The New Prisons

be rightly described as noble, and with town houses of almost supercilious respectability. The strongly barred lower windows suggest costly possessions and carefully guarded wealth. The fine stone balconies will have been radiant on many a gala day with brightly dressed women, while the great pillared doorways must have at one time echoed with the wheels of painted coaches and the footsteps of lackeys in brave liveries of scarlet and gold (Plate 10).

At the end of the street is the Palazzo Farnese (Plate 12), which Hare affirms is "the most majestic and magnificent of all the Palaces of Rome"; and near it, in the Via Giulia, is the Falconieri Palace, which, if not actually magnificent, is certainly as beautiful, in its river front, as any like building in the city. The Palazzo Sacchetti stands also in the street, while, palatial in its way, the old, weary-looking Collegio Ghislieri adds the dignity of learning and soberness to this flamboyant highway.

Very evident is it that the Via Giulia is now neither rich nor fashionable. It is, in fact, rather a dirty street, where the wind seems to eddy the waste paper of the district, and where bare-headed women are ever to be seen in various attitudes of gossiping. High up on the wall of a stately house is a coat of arms carved in stone, the arms of one of the noble families of Rome; but the shield is nearly hidden by some sheets and towels which are hanging out to dry from the window above. It would look strange to see washing dangling from every window in Piccadilly, but the sight is quite as incongruous in this street of fine houses. Indeed, on a Monday, when the washing is apparently "done," the

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

whole of the spare underclothing of the inhabitants of the Via Giulia must be displayed on the house fronts. In the ground floor of a right lordly mansion is a shop for the sale of hams, bags of lard, salt fish and lumps of white cheese that look like fragments of wet concrete. In a hall, where a gorgeous porter once strutted with his staff, are two shabby men making rush-bottomed chairs. Among the delicate carving over what was at one time a boudoir window are entangled the paper streamers of last year's carnival, while in the window itself a petticoat hangs from one nail and a birdcage from another. From a courtyard, out of which once poured the sound of water dripping in a fountain, and the scent of roses, there now floats that sickly, dreadful smell—common in poor quarters in Italy—which is faint and acrid, and compounded, it would seem, of an anæsthetic, of mouldy gases of decomposition, together with a revolting suggestion of cooking fat and sour wine.

The Via Giulia also is a street of prominent piety, for there are either in it, or abutting upon it, no fewer than ten churches. Most of these are so wan and deserted as practically to efface themselves, but two demand some consideration. Guido and the four hired assassins, who were awaiting death with him in the new jail, were all natives of Tuscany, and in view of this it is curious that the church at the north end of the Via Giulia should be San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, the same being the national church of the Tuscans, built somewhere about 1520 at the expense of the city of Florence. It is curious also that the church at the south end of the Via Giulia should be Santa Maria della Morte, the Church of Our Lady of Death (Plate 11). It is a little round church,

## The New Prisons

very curious and picturesque. On each side of the central door, which opens on the street, are stone pilasters, the capitals of which are made in the form of toothless human skulls, crowned with wreaths. A like skull surmounts the window over the door. On the wall is a white marble tablet on which is shown a man lying dead on the open ground, while a skeleton with ghastly wings, made up of straggling, damp-looking feathers, contemplates him with an aspect of weary disapproval. This ancient church is in the charge of a pious brotherhood—the Fratelloni della Buona Morte—who devote themselves to the burial of the neglected dead. More than probable is it that these Brethren of Kindly Death undertook the burial of Guido and his four associates. If this be so, then the church at the north end of the street would have cared for these Tuscans when living, and the church at the south end of the street when dead. Both of these churches are shown in Vasi's print, reproduced in Plate 12.

The Carceri Nuove stand in about the middle of the Via Giulia, between Prison Alley and the Alley of the Evil Way, or Vicolo del Malpasso. They are represented by two heavy square buildings, connected by a transverse block of less dimensions. One of the main prisons has its front in the Via Giulia, while the other overlooks the river, near to the bank of which it stands. This immense, crushing mass of grey stone, drab plaster and mellow brick is four storeys in height, and "the whole," as John Evelyn would say, "much obliged to Pope Innocent X." From the drawing of the prison given in Antonio Tempesta's map of 1664, and also in Falda's plan of 1676 (reproduced in Plate 105),

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

the structure would appear to have undergone no substantial alteration from that date until now, except perhaps in the matter of the roof, which on the river front is flat, whereas in the map it is sloping. The distant view of the Carceri Nuove, as shown in Vasi's print (Plate 12), is precisely the same as it appears at the present day. The windows of the prison are barred with iron like a trap, and, in common with all other jails, the general aspect of the place is most forbidding.

The entrance to the prison is in the Via Giulia. It is of ashen stone, solid and uncompromising, and as plain as the portal of an Etruscan tomb. An entry more severe, more melancholy, more inhospitable, could not be conceived. Through this very portal have passed Pompilia and Caponsacchi, Guido and the four clowns who helped him in his murdering. Pompilia, no doubt, was the first of the seven to enter this dismal doorway, and within ten months of that occasion all of the seven were dead save one—the young priest. Over the door is this inscription:—"Justitiæ et Clementiæ securiori ac mitiori reorum custodiæ. Novum Carcerem. Innocentius Pont. Max. Posuit. Anno Domini M.D.C.L.V." (Plate 13).

The building ceased to be used as a jail in 1897. It is now a *depôt* or school of instruction for prison warders.

The interior of the prison is more forbidding even than the outside. That part of the building which stands in the Via Giulia is given up to the *depôt* and has, in unimportant details, been modified to meet the needs of its new service; but the greater part of the jail, including all that portion which is towards the river,



55.—LAKE TRASIMENE, FROM THE HIGH ROAD,  
Showing Torricella at the edge of the Lake.



## The New Prisons

is unoccupied, and is in precisely the same condition as it was when the last prisoner was marched out of the cells.

There is a certain melancholy about an empty house which has been long occupied by men and women, but this deserted jail struck me as one of the most dismal human habitations that I had ever visited.

Prison buildings are not subject to much change, and this structure is built so solidly and of such determined materials as to seem to be incapable of any change short of that effected by an earthquake. The original stone stairs still stand, although they are much worn, and in places extensively repaired. The long stone corridors are vaulted and unusually lofty. The end of each corridor is closed by a merciless iron gate and grille. With few exceptions, the prisoners were herded together in large, airy cells, capable of taking from twelve to fourteen beds. These cells have a cove roof or a vaulted ceiling, in each angle of which is a large star. This curious and inspiring ornament is the only one the designer of the jail allowed himself to use. The windows are blocked with heavy bars, while the opening into the cell and the opening through the outer wall of the jail being on different levels, it is impossible for a prisoner to see anything from his room but a patch of sky. Indeed, the lower edge of the outside window is on a level with the upper edge of the opening into the prison ward.

The locks and bolts are curious and ancient, but the prisoners' quarters are, as regards light, ventilation and cubic space, as good as those of the most modern jail.

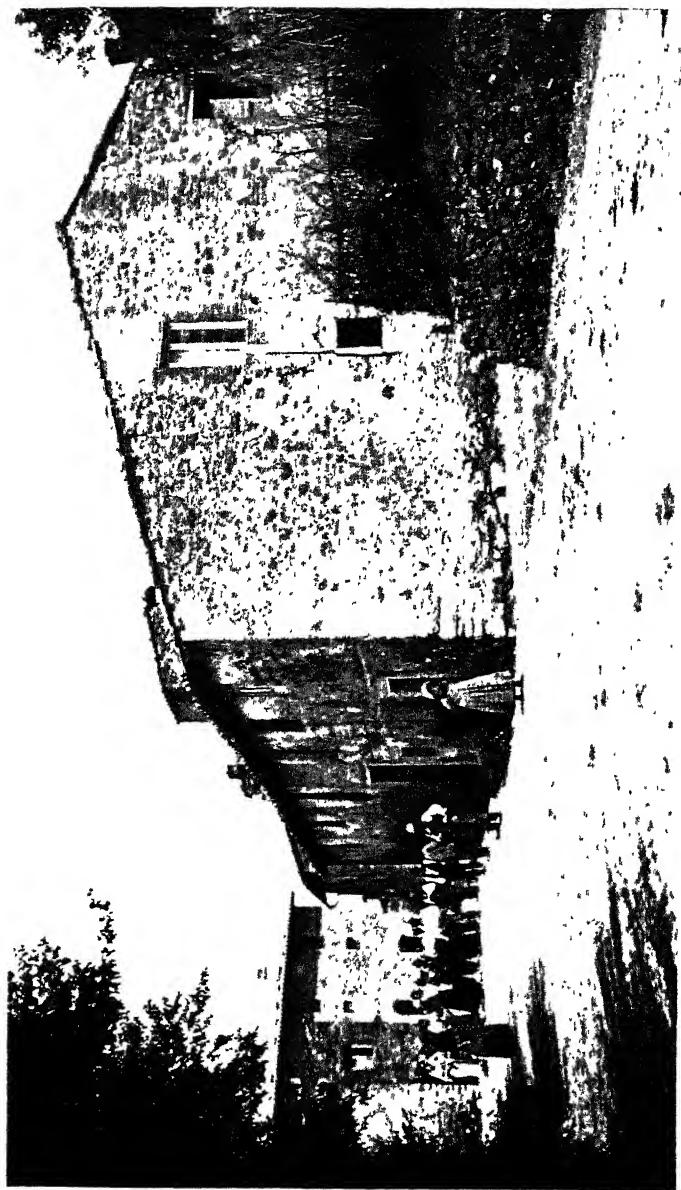


## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

The cells for prisoners condemned to death are on the roof of the river-side block of the prison. They consist of a single row of well-designed cells in the central line of the building, with a corridor on either side of them. The door of a cell opens into one corridor, while on the opposite side is a wicket opening into the other. The cells are ranged alternately on the following plan:—If cell No. 1 has its door in the right-hand corridor, cell No. 2 will have its entrance in the passage on the left. Thus, although the rooms are in a single line, the doors of one half of them belong to one passage, and the doors of the remaining half to the other. This lessens the probability of prisoners meeting, and at the same time allows of a more complete surveillance of the cell if a warder be on duty in each passage.

On the side of each of the corridors is a walled-in exercise yard, open to the air, and approached from the corridor by two doors. The cells have no windows, being lit only from the roof. Thus it is that an occupant of one of these rooms is not only absolutely isolated, but can see nothing of the outer world but a limited square of sky.

In Plate 15 the structure to be seen on the roof is composed of this row of cells with the connected yards, the long wall (against the sky line) that faces the spectator being the boundary of one of the exercise courts. The two windows at the end, above the cornice, light the two corridors described, while the raised structure between them is the terminal part of the single line of cells. The two side windows open into a latrine.



56. —THE OLD POSTING-INN (the nearest house), TORRICELLA.



## The New Prisons

Browning, with great dramatic effect, places Guido's cell in the basement of the building, and describes the count as sitting

"On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,  
Where the hot vapour of an agony,  
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down  
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears."

I was assured that there are no underground cells in the prison, and, furthermore, in the Old Yellow Book it says: "The condemned were made *to go downstairs*, and were placed upon separate carts to be drawn to the place of execution." It is evident, therefore, that the condemned cells were in the upper storeys of the jail.

There is no room in the present jail that has the reputation, however doubtful, of having been a torture chamber; yet in this prison Guido and his accomplices were assuredly subject to the torture, while Silvagni, in the work already quoted, writes: "There was a torture chamber in the Carceri Nuove, which certainly remained intact up to 1809, when my uncle visited it in company with Salicetto, the Emperor's Minister."

## 9. THE ROUTE TO THE PLACE OF EXECUTION

ON Saturday, February 22nd, 1698, Count Guido Franceschini and his four associates in villainy were executed in the Piazza del Popolo, as has already been recounted (p. 88). They were brought down the stairs of the Carceri Nuove to the door of the jail, and were then placed, uncomfortably bound, in the five tumbrels that had been waiting in a line in the Via Giulia. February is the month when Rome is at her dreariest. The afternoon of that day may have been bright and the sun Italian, but there are many days in the winter when the sun is not seen, when the air is still, when the grey clouds, chilled and sullen, descend almost to the housetops. The trees are then bare but for a few crackling and mis-shapen leaves left from the autumn; men bury themselves in their cloaks, and the gossip in the cheerless streets is curt and ungenial. One may imagine that it was on such an afternoon as this that the procession started from the great prison. This journey to death must have been as gloomy a spectacle as the Eternal City could provide—the five carts, within each of which sat a scared, gaping man, pinioned with ropes, by the side of a priest with a crucifix, the stern company of police, the horrible hooded figures of the Compassionate Brotherhood, the half-terrified crowd pouring through the narrow lanes like a tide, sweeping along

## The Route to the Place of Execution

with it the bodies of dying men, while raised high above all would be the great reassuring cross.

According to the Yellow Book the procession went "by the most densely populated streets," and the names of the streets are given. They are densely populated still, while in their general disposition they are, for the most part, but little altered (see Plates 16 and 105).

The clumsy carts would leave the Via Giulia by the Alley of the Evil Way. This is a short alley, drab and vacant, which opens into the Via del Pellegrino, or Road of the Pilgrim. Here the strange company would turn to the right. The Via del Pellegrino is a typical highway of old Rome. According to Martinelli\* it would appear to have been the Bond Street of the period, since it was devoted at that time to jewellers' and silversmiths' shops and to the sale of bonnets and hats. It is now a poor street, but still very busy and singularly well patronised by children, being a street of small shops and brimming with life. It is no longer possible to buy fine jewels in the street, but it has a high repute for cabbages, the stalks of which, according to apparent custom, are left behind in the roadway by the purchaser. The Pilgrims' Street is, indeed, a street of food shops, although among them may be a *fabbrica di sedie*, where rush-bottomed chairs are made, or a *cartoleria*, where one may buy post cards, ink, toys, blacking and string. Prominent among the food shops is the *maga-sin* of eggs and oil, where the eggs are in baskets and the oil in flasks, which hang from the ceiling and doorway like some gigantic fruit. More interesting are "*pane e paste*" shops, where bread, beans and long

\* "Roma." By Signor Fioravante Martinelli. Padua, 1650.

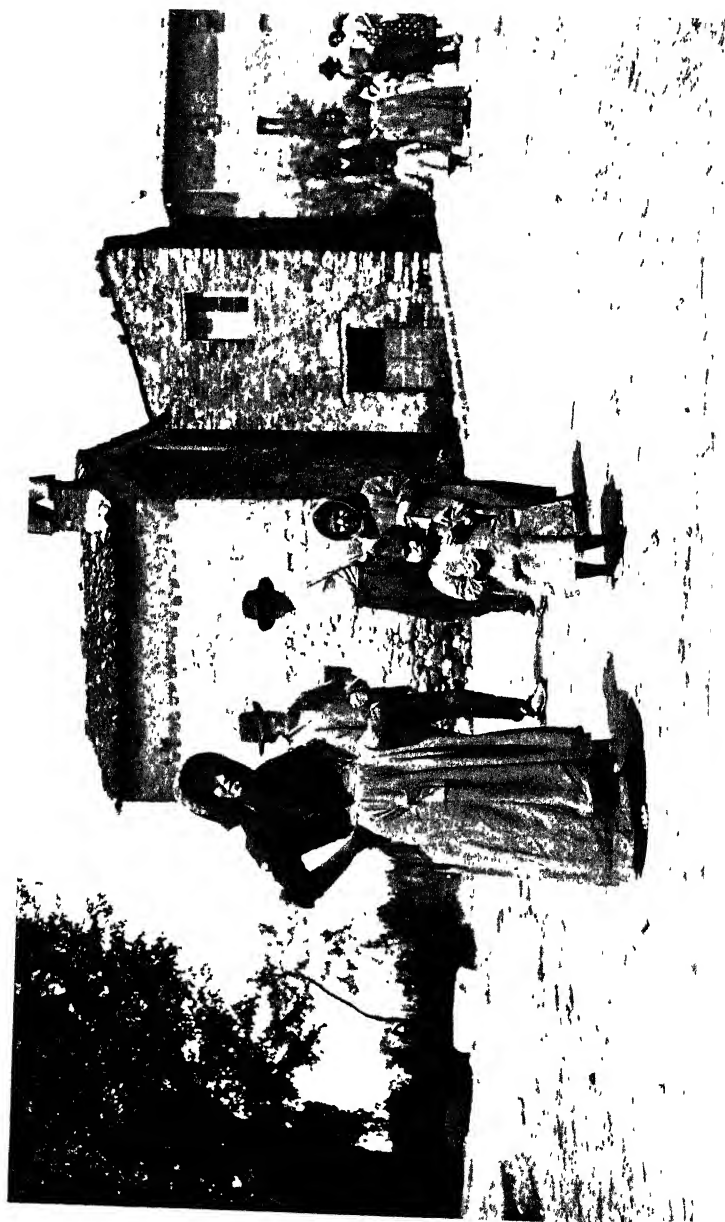
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

wax candles are sold, and where are exhibited the astounding forms that may be taken by "*pasta*." With macaroni in tubes and vermicelli in threads the world is familiar, but not so commonplace are fragments of paste in the form of wasps' nests (*nidi di vespe*), snails (*chiocciolate*), bobbins (*spolette*), wolf's eyes (*occhi di lupo*), celery sticks (*sedani*) and angels' hair in skeins (*capellini d'angelo a matasse*).

The route now turns to the left along the Via del Governo Vecchio, which street is cut across by the modern Corso Vittorio Emanuele, with its tram lines, its spacious pavements and its immense shops. The Street of the Governor—interesting because it represents the narrowest part of the route—is not greatly changed, and, in old walls, old windows and stone doorways, presents many relics of the street as Guido saw it.

The more ancient part of the street is habitually festooned with "washing." The houses, indeed, are draped with sheets, petticoats, and shirts, which form a white cascade dripping from every window and on occasion from the very roof. The display of white affords an agreeable relief, for the street itself is dark and dirty.

From Plate 17 it will be seen that the lane is so narrow that it could have admitted little more than the line of tumbrels, for it will be noticed that the hooded wine-cart at the bend of the lane nearly fills the roadway. At this particular bend in the lane is a very old house, which has been practically untouched by time, and is to-day as it was on that winter afternoon when the procession rolled along to the gallows. It is a dignified house, built partly of stone and partly of narrow Roman



57.—TORRICELLA.  
Showing the Small Size of the Houses.





## The Route to the Place of Execution

bricks. The stone windows are rounded, while the doorway takes the form of a simple solemn arch. The upper windows would have afforded an excellent view of the procession, for the house is just at the corner where the street turns towards the Pantheon. According to Baedeker, the building was erected in 1500 for the Papal Secretary, and would, therefore, have been nearly two hundred years old at the time of the story. The dwelling of the secretary to His Holiness is now a tavern known as "Al Bramante," and is as picturesque a wine-shop as any in Rome (Plate 18).

The carts carrying the condemned men then passed along to the end of the street, where are still to be seen remains of old houses, unexpected stables and dingy courts which present too detailed an insight into private life. At last the Piazza Pasquino was reached. This is a quaint, little triangular space containing still the mutilated statue called "Pasquino," a shapeless lump of stone, associated in some incongruous way with the Greek hero Menelaus, on the one hand, and a deformed tailor with a passion for writing spiteful and offensive comments upon people, on the other. In this piazza the procession halted before a grey chapel called the Church of the Agonizzanti. One function of this church is to administer the Last Sacrament to criminals who are on their way to death. Here, indeed, the Holy Office was carried out for the benefit of Guido and his four countrymen. According to the Yellow Book, the ceremony was so impressive as to move many of the onlookers to tears, while Guido's attitude was impressively devout. The church is insignificant, and as it was restored and

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

decorated as lately as 1862, it has lost its legitimate aspect of antiquity. Before the single door are two low steps, where no doubt the officiating priest and his assistants stood. Above the entry is this inscription:

ARCHISODALITHI ANIMIS MORIENTIUM  
IN EXTREMO AGONE JUVANDIS.

The church within is a cheerful little sanctuary, made bright by yellow grey columns and clouded by no reminiscence of its melancholy function (Plate 19).

Silvagni writes\* that he remembers, in 1840, reading a notice posted in the piazza, in which the faithful were exhorted to gain a plenary indulgence by visiting the Holy Sacrament exposed in the Church of the Agonizzanti in connection with the execution of a youth who had been condemned to death for sacrilege.

The procession then crossed the south end of the magnificent Piazza Navona, close to Bernini's famous fountain "Il Moro" (Plates 20 and 21). The figure of the Moor has his back turned to the road, while around him are jubilant tritons blowing water out of double horns. The fountain is unchanged, the little streams still splash into the pool as they did two hundred years ago when the murderers passed by. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that the water has ceased to run from the tritons' conch since Guido looked upon the fountain for the last time.

The Piazza Navona, on the other hand, has changed, and that for the better. In the time of the Franceschini tragedy the square was a squalid market place, given up to the bartering of old books and curiosities, to the

\* *Loc. cit.*

## The Route to the Place of Execution

sale of old iron, and to rows of untidy booths where the country people displayed their fruit. Moreover, it was the privileged place for the quack, the fortune-teller and the conjurer. Possibly it was not until the crowd swarming about the carts broke into the square that the spurious doctor, standing upon a tub, ceased to yell forth the virtue of his pills for ague and the falling sickness. John Evelyn was fond of the Piazza Navona. Writing in this very month of February, in the year 1645, he says : "20th February. I went, as was my usual custom, and spent an afternoon in Piazza Navona, as well to see what antiquities I could purchase among the people who hold market there for medals, pictures and such curiosities, as to hear the mountebanks prate and distribute their medicines."

The five condemned men would next be carried through the Via dei Canestrari and the Piazza S. Eustachio to the Pantheon, and thence to the Piazza Colonna (Plate 22). We are now in modern Rome, where scarcely a trace is to be found of any dwelling house that could claim to belong to the end of the seventeenth century. Since Guido's time this part has been altered beyond recognition. One would like to know where the hairdresser's shop stood, and whether the hairdresser, having closed her shop out of respect to her friend, peeped out through a crack in the shutter to see the last of the Tuscan nobleman who had spent so many hours in her establishment and had lied with such facile invention.

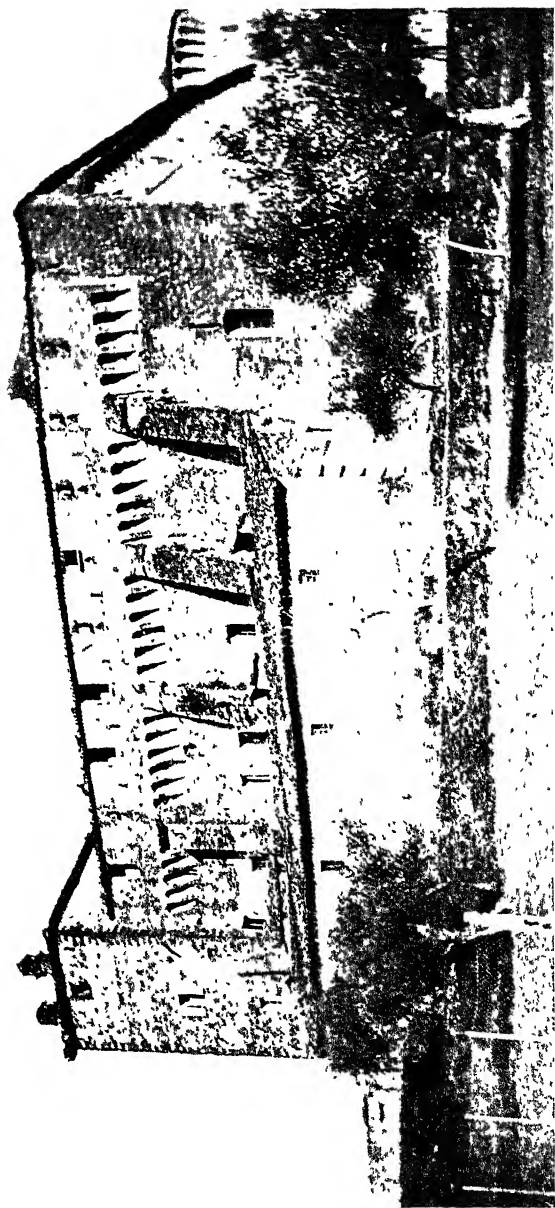
Last of all, the miserable company would enter the Corso, where every window and balcony, and every parapet on the roof, would be crowded with solemn

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

faces. It was not long since the carnival was over, when the famous street had been filled with just as dense a mob. Then the place rang with laughter and snatches of song, then every face was radiant with smiles, while the road was packed with gaily decked carriages filled with men and women in brilliant costume. Now the whole long road was silent. The only sound that broke the tense, unnatural quiet was the jolting of the wheels on the cobble stones, the shuffling of feet, the sobbing of women, the chant of the priests. In place of the line of dazzling equipages were five rude carts drawn by coarse horses, while in place of the chatting gallants and their ladies in silks and satins, as gay in colour as the bouquets they tossed to their friends, were five shabby, unshaven men in the garb of field labourers, whose lips muttered inaudibly, and whose eyes were never lifted from the crucifix held before them.

In this, the last stage of the journey, Count Guido would pass the little church in which he was married, would pass the street in which his brother lived, and would see before him the long, narrow lane, at the end of which was the closely shuttered house where he had stabbed his wife and the mother of his boy to death.

I found that to walk from the Carceri Nuove to the Piazza del Popolo by the route followed by the condemned men occupied some thirty-five minutes. The procession left the prison at 2 o'clock in the afternoon; so that, taking all things into consideration, it may be assumed that the piazza was reached about 3 p.m.



58.—THE CASTLE AT MAGIONE, FROM THE HIGH ROAD.



## 10. THE PIAZZA DEL POPOLO

**F**EW places in Rome are better known to the stranger than the Piazza del Popolo. Few places figure with more certainty in the diaries of the old-world traveller, for, before the railway came, this was the first part of the Eternal City that met the eye of the pilgrim, since all who journeyed to Rome from the north must needs enter the city through the Porta del Popolo. Many who had been on the road for weeks must have halted in this piazza and, looking round with an air of satisfaction, must have exclaimed, in any one of the languages of Europe, "And this is Rome!"

The Piazza del Popolo can now claim to be the most picturesque open space in the city (Plate 23). It forms an oval area, with, on either side, to the west and east, rising ground, so that it has the general aspect of an amphitheatre possessing a level, oval-shaped arena. The high ground to the east is the beautiful Monte Pincio, the "Hill of Gardens," covered with trees, with firs and palms, plane trees and ilex, and intersected by many winding paths making their way to the summit of the hill. The clean-cut, grey obelisk in the centre of the piazza has stood on its present site for over three hundred years, and it was in front of this imposing monolith that the scaffolds were erected. The somewhat ineffectual lions at the four corners of the platform are of a later date. The steps between the four fountains



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

are a favourite meeting place for countrymen. Here they rest on entering Rome, as they have done for centuries past ; and here they gather when, at the close of the day, they are about to start on the return journey across the Campagna.

At the south end of the piazza stand the twin churches of Santa Maria dei Miracoli and Santa Maria di Monte Santo. These heavy, domed buildings, erected in 1664, served to separate the three streets which diverge from this side of the square. The street in the centre is the famous Corso, leading to the Capitol, the Forum and the Colosseum. The street on the right is the Via di Ripetta, which follows, for a while, the bank of the Tiber. The street on the left is the Strada Paolina or Via del Babuino, where, at the corner of the Via Vittoria, was the home of Pompilia. There are ample steps leading up to the doors of the two churches, and there can be little doubt that they were crowded with spectators on that afternoon in February when the five men were done to death in the centre of the arena.

On the opposite side of the piazza is the mighty stone gate, the famous North Gate of Rome. It is a singularly massive structure, dating from 1562, in which there is an intolerable deal of masonry to exceeding little gate (Plate 26). It must have looked still more overpowering at the time of the story, for the side entries were not added until 1878. The stonework is of a delicate drab colour, shaded with faint tints of brown and yellow. The north side of the gate is lavishly decorated with marble columns, marble tablets and most copious inscriptions. On either side of the centre gateway are two immense statues of solemn men.



59.—VIEW FROM MAGIONE.  
Showing the Character of the Country crossed in Pompilia's Flight.



## The Piazza del Popolo

Each holds a book in his hand, while on the face of each is an expression of such vast vacuity as can only be observed in the state known as senile dementia.

From the gate starts that very ancient road, the Via Flaminia, which—straight as an arrow—makes for the north, by Narni and Foligno, pushing on until it meets the shores of the Adriatic at the old Umbrian town of Rimini, which was the frontier fortress of Italy looking towards Gaul.

It was through this gate that Guido and the four slunk on the eve of the murder. It was through this gate that they fled to gain the road to Tuscany. Under this forbidding archway passed Caponsacchi and Pompilia on their way from Castelnuovo to the great prison in the Via Giulia. Guido, as he stood on the scaffold, would face this stolid gateway. Through the arch he could see the white road leading to his home in Arezzo, and, where the road ended, the green country around his brother's villa by the Ponte Milvio.

By the side of the gate is the beautiful Church of Santa Maria del Popolo, together with the rambling picturesque monastic buildings which cluster behind it (Plate 25). The church was built in 1480, and has suffered not a little from the merciless hands of the "restorer." A considerable flight of steps leads up to its three green doors, and on this stair a huge company, packed shoulder to shoulder, must have gathered on the day of the execution.

It is interesting to think how many remarkable personages, in years gone by, have walked up the steps of Saint Mary of the People. There are two among them who haunt the memory by reason of their incongruity:

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a curious couple they make, a woman and a man. The one, Lucrezia Borgia, considered by some to be so vile as to be "outside the pale of humanity," who came here, at the tender age of twenty-one, to offer thanks to Almighty God for her betrothal to her third husband, Alfonso d'Este. The other, Martin Luther, then a fervent Popish priest of twenty-eight, who came hither—just ten years later—to celebrate Mass in that Church to the destruction of which he was destined to devote the remainder of his life. It was in the Augustinian convent adjoining Santa Maria del Popolo that Luther lived during his sojourn in Rome.

The Piazza del Popolo at the time of the Franceschini tragedy was a rough, ill-cared-for open space, used as a sort of caravanseraï by those peasants, shepherds and herdsmen who came into Rome from the country to the north. Many a time the place must have been nearly blocked with market-carts, pack mules and cattle. As will be seen from the old print (Plate 24), the roads were none too good, although the mass of ruins scattered at the base of the obelisk have been introduced purely for artistic effect. On the south side of the obelisk was a plain fountain composed of three basins of diminishing size, placed one above the other. This fountain is very exactly drawn in Antonio Tempesta's map of 1664. It is also shown on a smaller scale in Falda's plan (Plate 106). On the east side of the piazza, at the foot of the Pincio, was a row of small houses and barn-like structures, while the Pincio itself was occupied by the monastery vineyard and gardens connected with Santa Maria del Popolo. On the west side of the square was a large walled garden and a few poor

## The Piazza del Popolo

houses, while opposite the Church of St. Mary of the People stood a low rambling cottage of exceptional meanness.\*

The large fountains on either side of the square, between which Browning assumes that the execution took place,† did not exist at this period.

The piazza was emphatically a Piazza of the People. Here they met together as travellers meet at an inn, here they gossiped and bargained, here they caroused, and on occasion slept, and here, also on occasion, they were hanged by the neck.

\* An excellent engraving of the Piazza del Popolo is contained in Graevio's "Thesaurus Antiquitatum Romanorum," published in 1696.

† Book I., line 359.

## II

### THE INN AT MERLUZZA

**I**MMEDIATELY after the murder in the Via Vittoria, Guido and his hirelings fled across the Piazza del Popolo, and, passing through the Great North Gate, made their way along the Flaminian Road to the Ponte Milvio, the ancient bridge across the Tiber. On the other side of the river was the vineyard belonging to Guido's brother, the Abate Paolo, in the villa of which the five wretched Tuscans had been hiding all through Christmas. To this villa they returned for a moment to collect such few belongings as they had, and then made for the frontier by the Via Cassia. They got as far as Merluzza on foot. Here, utterly exhausted, they took shelter in an inn, and here, at the break of dawn, they were discovered and made prisoners.

The distance from the Porta del Popolo to the Ponte Milvio is three kilometres ( $1\frac{7}{8}$  miles). The road is as straight and as level as if it were ruled on a map, is remarkably muddy when wet and remarkably dusty when dry, is seamed by the rails of a tramway and punctuated by the iron posts proper to the same. It passes through an unfinished and undecided suburb, which is, in the meantime, slatternly and woeful. There are factories by the road that look prosperous, as well as squatter shops, emerging from the shanty stage, that look hopeful; but there are also immense houses, unoccupied and in-





## The Inn at Merluzza

complete, that to their innermost hollow re-echo to the clatter of the passing tramcar. They remain as monuments to an ambition that was never realised or to an enterprise that failed. These partly built houses are of such varied type that they give to the place the aspect of an experimental street where builders' ventures, failures and ideas are retained for reference or for educational purposes.

Some way farther on, towards the bridge, the road passes through a frowsy, mongrel land, a hybrid quarter, part country, part town, such as is to be found on the growing margin of every great city. Through a coarse breach in the wall the stately garden, once as secluded as a convent close, has been entered by the despoiler from the town and has become a jungle of rotting weeds and unutterable filth. Green hedges have been whittled by street urchins into a starved row of crooked sticks, waste paper is blown about in the place of rose petals, while every tree trunk is plastered over with gaudy posters which announce, as with the voice of a trumpet, the virtues of a new liqueur. The green meadow, the vineyard, the lady's pleasaunce have been desecrated and defiled. The virginal sweet country has been pawed over by the dirty hand of the satyr of the city, while on either side are horrible waste places from which all meaning and all association have vanished, so that they are in the story of the land as vacant blots in a man's memory.

Among the rubbish heaps, the picnic inns and the beer gardens are just a few of the old low-roofed, squat cottages left, still covered with creepers, still beautiful, but so unhappy in their surroundings that it is merciful

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

to hope that they will soon be hacked to pieces to make room for the less incongruous petrol store of corrugated iron.

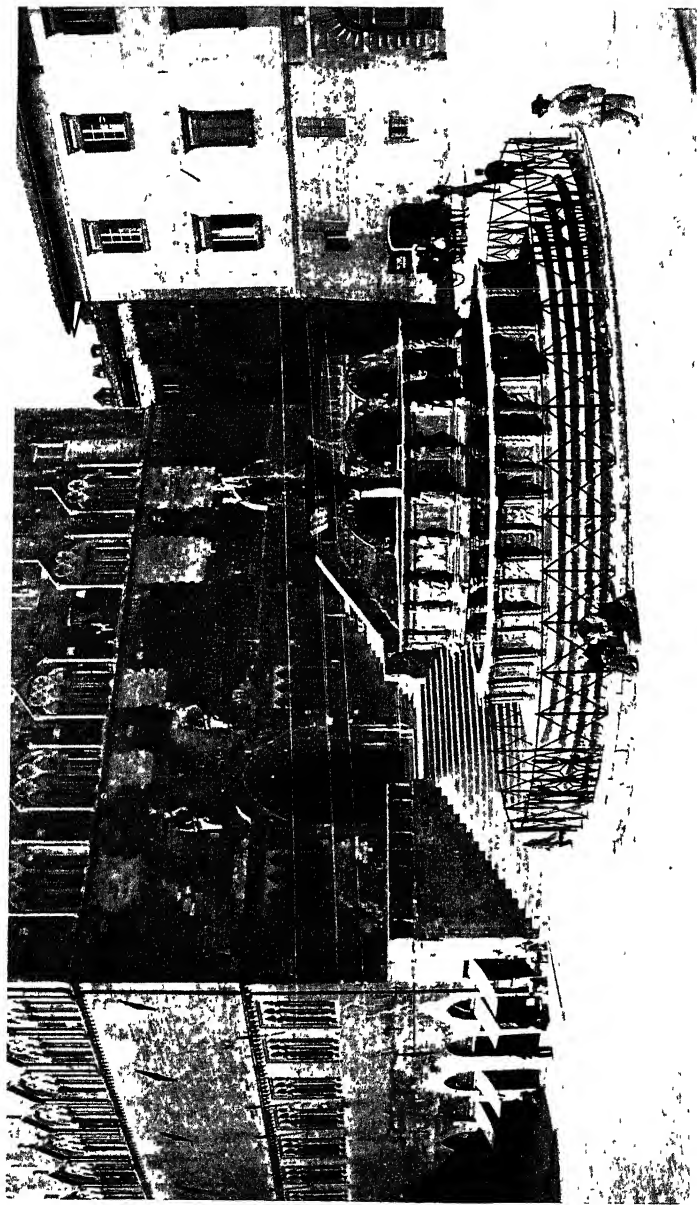
In Guido Franceschini's day this part of the Via Flaminia presented only a few scattered houses, together with many gardens, stretching across the open country.\* Traces of these houses and of substantial villas are still to be seen, while, no doubt, they were interspersed with "wretched dwellings," as Signor Silvagni maintains, for he describes the suburb outside the Porta del Popolo as "miserable."† The suburb may have been miserable, but the road was not unpicturesque. On one side of it now, for some distance, is a bare yellow cliff hung with bushes, capped by cypresses and riddled with romantic-looking caves, some of which are still inhabited (Plate 27).

A little way along the road is an old and handsome fountain with a water trough. It is in the classical style, and lacks nothing in the way of marble tablet and inscription (Plate 28). I cannot help thinking that at this fountain Guido and his followers must have stayed to quench their thirst on the night of January 2nd. It is a long run from the Via Vittoria, and murdering is hot work. This is the first water they would have come upon in their flight, for they would never have dared to halt in the Piazza del Popolo with the hue and cry resounding in the alarmed streets behind them.

The Ponte Milvio, or Ponte Molle, is a handsome

\* See for example the Plan of Rome given in Scotto's "Intinerario d' Italia," published in Padua in 1670.

† "La Corte e la Societa Romana nei XVIII e XIX secoli."



61.—NICCOLO PISANO'S FOUNTAIN, PERUGIA.



## The Inn at Merluzza

grey bridge, with an imposing gateway of stone at the north end which was not in existence in Guido's time. The first bridge erected upon this spot was built in the year 109 B.C. Some traces of the old foundations are still to be seen, but the bridge took its present form in 1805. Old prints, however, show that the Ponte Milvio at the end of the seventeenth century was but little different from the present structure (see Plates 29 and 30).

On the city side of the bridge is the queer little Chapel of Saint Andrew, built in 1462 to commemorate an occasion when the Pope, the cardinals, the priests and monks of every degree, together with "the whole population of Rome," came to the foot of the bridge in solemn procession to receive a gift to the city. The present was nothing more than a man's head—a brown, shrivelled, mummified thing, in a box; but it was a part of no less a person than Saint Andrew, and it had reached Rome after very vivid adventures.

The Tiber here is a fine stream, not cærulean, as Virgil describes it, nor yellow nor tawny, as Macaulay makes it appear; but a river of a sober, putty-colour, flowing between banks of bare mud.

The actual village or hamlet at Ponte Milvio is exceedingly depressing, especially in the winter time, for it is given over entirely to conviviality of so uncouth and squalid a type as to engender melancholy. In England it would be classed as a Bank Holiday resort. The sadness of the place lies in the fact that it aims at being a rustic village, where the folk of the city can enjoy the pleasures of the country; but the

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country is shabby and out at elbows, and cannot be made pastoral by a few crude pergolas and some painted arbours. In this Arcadia, Strephon and Amaryllis are decked, not with garlands and wreaths, but with papier-mâché noses and paper hats, while the shepherd's pipe is replaced by the concertina, and the gambols of the lamb by the performing clown.

Beyond the bridge, and behind the would-be-joyous village, is the rim of rising ground which forms the fringe of the Roman Campagna. This is a beautiful belt of green hillocks covered with trees, of gardens and prim villas, where from any clearing can be seen the vast figure of the city of Rome, with—towering above it—the basilica of St. Peter's in the Vatican.

It was somewhere in this pleasant belt by the river-side that the Abate Paolo had his vineyard, and here was the little house among the vines where his brother and the four murderers hid themselves during the dismal Christmas that preceded the tragedy in the Via Vittoria.

At the Ponte Milvio two ancient highways take their departure for the north. The road to the right is the Via Flaminia, which—as already stated—runs due north across the country until it meets the shores of the Adriatic at Rimini. The road was built in the year 220 B.C., by the Consul Flaminius, by the same Flaminius who, a few years later (217 B.C.), was defeated by Hannibal at the disastrous battle of Lake Trasimene. It was by this very highway that the news of the annihilation of the Roman army and of the death of the great road-maker reached Rome. By this road came Pompilia and Caponsacchi in their flight from

## The Inn at Merluzza

Arezzo, while less than fourteen miles along the way from the Ponte Milvio is the little town of Castelnuovo, which was the scene of the most dramatic episode in the story of the Franceschini.

The road to the left is the Via Cassia, another old Roman highway. It runs north-west by Baccano, Viterbo, Bolsena, Orvieto and Chiusi to Arezzo and Florence. It is a less easy road than the Via Flaminia, and in olden times was comparatively little used except by horsemen and mule teams. Travellers on the way to Rome from northern Europe came more usually by the Via Flaminia, or, as it was commonly called, the "Consular Road."

It was by the Via Cassia that Guido and his associates fled in their attempt to reach the Tuscan frontier. The road had every attraction. Although rough and hilly, it was the most direct road to Arezzo, and was the way that those who travelled on foot would naturally take. Moreover, it was less frequented, while for some miles after leaving Rome it crossed a very desolate part of the Campagna.

The road passes through a singularly bare country, almost untenanted, where for miles the traveller may not come upon a single habitation of man. The first place reached by the fugitives along the road was the little hamlet of La Storta, which is nine miles north of the city. Here is a post-house, the first out of Rome. Here Guido, in the depth of the night in January, hammered at the door, aroused the landlord and demanded horses for himself and his company. He probably knocked upon the door with the handle of the dagger which was still wet with the blood of

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Pompilia, and probably, too, the landlord, as he parleyed from an upper window, was a little alarmed at the appearance of five bedraggled men, in the garb of vine-dressers, who stood before the door panting for breath, and who were very free with their curses when horses were declined until the necessary permit could be produced. The five would stand out clearly enough before the eye of the housewife if she peeped through the shutter, for it was a bright night, and only three days after the full moon.\* This midnight halt at La Storta forms one of the vivid scenes in the story—the sleeping village, the long black shadows cast by the moon across the white road, the gaunt figure of Guido Franceschini knocking at the barred door, and his four companions in a group behind him, faint with fatigue, fanning their dripping foreheads, or stooping forwards to gain breath with their hands on their knees.

La Storta has probably altered but little since the time when Guido halted there on that winter's night. It is a pleasant little hamlet, consisting of a few old dwellings, a large farmhouse and the ancient inn. The inn is a low building, of no mean size, with a portico facing the road, and with ample outhouses and stables clustered around it. It is still a busy place, for it is an inn of excellent repute. Inscriptions painted on the wall announce that it provides choice wines, beer and mineral waters, as well as fresh eggs and garden produce. It, furthermore, is furnished with "saloons for banquets." Stripped of its modern plaster and its paint, it would appear once more as the old post-house which has so

\* The full moon fell on December 30th, 1697.





62.—PERUGIA: A DARK ENTRY



## The Inn at Merluzza

rejoiced the hearts of travellers in centuries gone by, for La Storta is the last stage in the journey to Rome (Plate 31).

La Storta is an oasis in the Campagna, and when well clear of the hamlet the features of this open country can be well appreciated. It is a wide, undulating land, naked and bleak, immense, monotonous, and in colour a weary, faded green. This is the Campagna in January. In the spring it is a little brightened by flowers. In the summer, again, it is parched and brown. On all sides, for miles and miles, is the same vast ocean of waving downs, smooth as a heaving sea when the wind has dropped, without a house in sight and relieved only by occasional trees, by some stretches of wood, by a few green glens, by deep gullies which recall the dongas on the South African veldt, and by the long white, hedgeless road. "What do you think the famous Campagna is like?" writes the cheery de Brosses, who saw this vast grass-land in the winter. "It consists of a succession of sterile hillocks, deserted, uncultured, most dreary and intensely miserable." The Earl of Perth, who crossed the Campagna in May and had an eye for picturesque scenery, could see nothing in this vast panorama "but wild, uncultivated collines." Those who are familiar with this district in the winter can quite believe that one hundred years and more ago it was haunted, as Silvagni asserts, by brigands, rogues and vagabonds, as well as infested by wolves.

Just beyond La Storta, and to the right of the road, there is a remarkable part of the Campagna, which, while it would not interest Guido and his friends, may be lingered over for a moment. It can best be

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

described in the words of George Dennis\*: "A wide sweep of the Campagna lies before us, in this part broken into ravines or narrow glens, which, by varying the lines of the landscape, redeem it from the monotony of a plain, and by patches of wood relieve it of its usual nakedness and sterility. On a steep cliff, about a mile distant, stands the village of Isola—a village in fact, but in appearance a large chateau, with a few outhouses around it. Behind it rises the long, swelling ground which once bore the walls, temples and palaces of Veii, but is now a bare down, partly fringed with wood, and without a single habitation on its surface. . . . Such is Veii—once the most powerful, the most wealthy city of Etruria, renowned for its beauty, its arts and refinement, which in size equalled Athens and Rome, and in military force was not inferior to the latter—now void and desolate, without one house or habitant, its temples and palaces level with the dust, and nothing beyond a few fragments of walls and some empty sepulchres remaining to tell the traveller that here Veii was." And yet it was from Veii that a host of fighting-men poured forth to join Lars Porsena of Clusium when he made his march on Rome and was met by Horatius and his comrades at the bridge.

As has already been stated (p. 74), the five murderers, after the rebuff at La Storta, found refuge in an inn which is described in the Yellow Book as "a few miles from Rome," and more precisely as the tavern of Merluzza, in the direction of Baccano. Now Merluzza, or Merlazza, finds a place on the map on the Via Cassia at exactly 24 kilometres (or  $14\frac{7}{8}$  miles) from Rome—that

\* "The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria." Vol. I., chap. I.

## The Inn at Merluzza

is to say, between five and six miles beyond La Storta. When this particular point of the road is reached it will be discovered that Merluzza is not a village, is not even a hamlet, but is the name simply of a district of the Campagna. One kilometre beyond it is an isolated and ancient watch tower, the Torre del Bosco, a grey, spectral tower, standing in a spinney, like a pillar of salt; while beyond again—just 4 kilometres from Merluzza—is the curious Valley of Baccano, at one time the crater of a volcano, now a green basin surrounded by a smoothly moulded amphitheatre of hills.

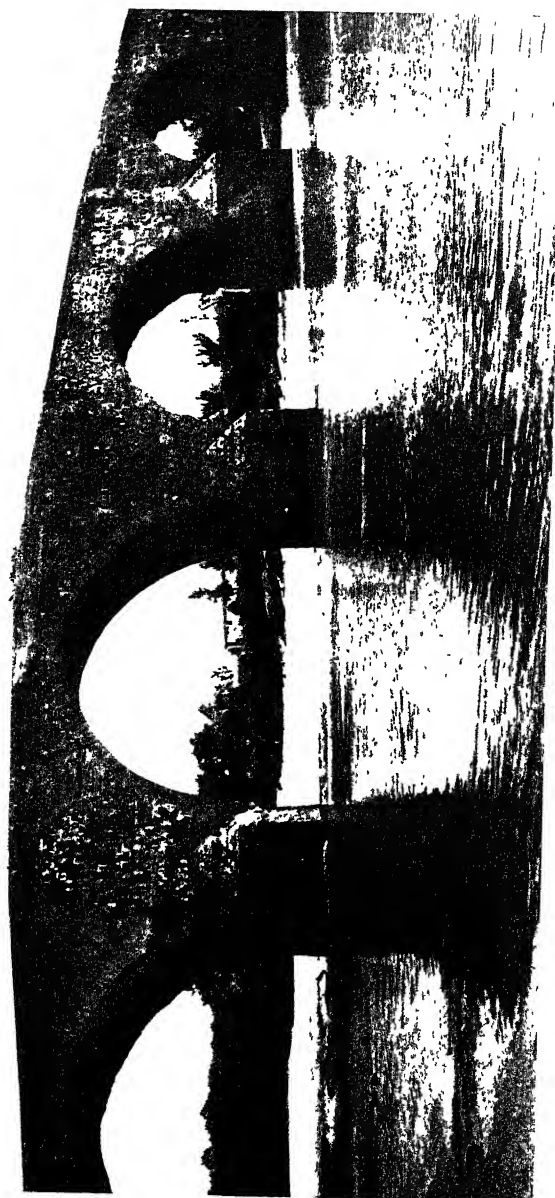
Now at Merluzza there is one solitary house, and that a very ancient one. It stands on the left-hand side of the road. It is not only alone, but there is no other house in sight. This building is prominently placed, for it occupies the top of a hill or ridge on the side towards Rome. This high ground has an elevation of 810 feet, and thus it is that the solitary house can be seen from afar by any who follow the Via Cassia out of Rome. The country at Merluzza is singularly desolate and bleak, but the view from the height is magnificent, for it commands the whole of the Campagna up to the walls of Rome, while at the end of the vast grey plain there stands up against the skyline, like a dot of cloud, the great dome of St. Peter's.

The solitary house at Merluzza is now practically derelict; but it was at one time an inn, and there can be no doubt that it was within the walls of this lonely tavern that Guido and the four were arrested at the break of dawn on January 3rd, 1698. From the isolated position of the inn, on a height in the open Campagna, it is probable that its grimy walls were not unacquainted with

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

rogues and vagabonds ; so that Guido, stained though he was with blood and dirt, would feel assured of at least a cautious welcome. The house is of good size and is very substantially built of stone. It presents an upper floor the rooms of which are small and low. A crumbling stone stair leads to the main door, which opens on to the road. There are two other doorways, on the south side of the house, which look towards Rome. They are surmounted by round arches of stone, are flanked by stone pilasters, and are evidently of considerable age (Plate 32). From the general aspect of the house one would gather that, even in Franceschini's time, it was a building which had been long familiar to the passer-by.

Standing in front of this melancholy tavern, early in the morning of a day in January, I found it easy to recall the scene in the road for which it had formed the background two centuries ago. In the highway would be the group of dazed and sullen prisoners tied to their horses and surrounded by a guard of police. On the steps before the door of the inn would be the distracted landlord, very scantily dressed, whose sympathy with the ill-fortune of his late guests would be tempered by a sense of the suspicion which had fallen upon his house ; while from the upper windows the women of the inn, hastily aroused, would be watching the movements of the strange company. If Guido turned his gaze towards the south, he would see on the fringe of the plain the city of Rome made rose-coloured by the light of the rising sun, and would wonder what fate awaited him within its gentle-looking walls.



63.—THE PONTE SAN GIOVANNI OVER THE TIBER.





### III

#### AREZZO

"AREZZO'S but a little place," writes Robert Browning in "The Ring and the Book." Little it certainly is when compared with Rome or Florence, but it has a population of over sixteen thousand people, and it may be doubted if at any period within historical times its roll of citizens has been less than now. Arezzo is one of the venerable cities of Italy, having been famous as Arretium, one of the twelve towns of the great Etruscan Federation. It was here that the Consul Flaminius, the road-maker, had his camp on the eve of the fatal battle of Lake Trasimene. Arezzo was never tired of fighting. In the bloody quarrel between the Guelphs and Ghibellines the men of Arezzo were at all times in the thick of it. They spent their leisure in the making of red pottery, which became famous the world over; but on the sound of alarm they kicked over the potter's wheel and rushed to the ramparts with the clay still red on their hands.

The town lies near the end of a vast level plain, the Val di Chiana, on a slight hillock or slope at the foot of the Alpe di Poti. Behind, and at a respectful distance, stand the Etruscan Apennines, the Alpe di Catenaja and the "Mountains of the Moon." Arezzo is excellently placed. Viewed from afar, it appears as a low, dome-shaped mass of houses from the unassuming

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

summit of which rise the quaint campanile of Caponsacchi's church, Santa Maria della Pieve, the bell-tower of the Palazzo Communale and the long roof of the Cathedral.

Arezzo is now, as it always has been, a walled city. It is confined within the limits of its ancient fortifications. Up to its very walls creeps the artless country. Those who lean over the ramparts look down upon growing corn or upon olive trees, or in the winter time upon oxen ploughing. Only in one place has the city broken out of its long-respected boundaries. This is at the San Spirito Gate, where is a disorderly suburb. The houses seem to have rushed out of the town, as schoolboys dash out of school, and to have disposed themselves in untidy groups along the Perugia Road. Arezzo is proud of many things—of its blood-thirstiness in the past, of its red pottery, of Petrarch, the sweet singer, and of Guido Monaco, the inventor of musical notation, both of whom were born within its gates; but it is prouder still of its fine, upstanding walls. These walls are very motherly in the way in which they enfold the city in their arms and, at the same time, very defiant in the stern front they present to the open plain. They are built of small square stones, and are in perfect preservation, although they date from a remote period in the Middle Ages.

The town is as pleasant a one as is to be found in the whole of Umbria. It is clean, prim and cheery, and full of memories of old days. The main street, the Corso, mounts up from the San Spirito Gate, past the Church of the Pieve, to the top of the town, where are the Duomo and the Palazzo Communale. This



64.—THE FIRST VIEW OF THE TIBER IN THE PROCESS OF FLIGHT,  
Looking Down Stream from the Ponte San Giovanni.



## Arezzo

high street is always bustling and full of life. The houses, like the shops, have been much modernised, so that those who enter Arezzo from the Perugia Road find themselves in a bright, up-to-date little city. This modern aspect, however, is limited to the Corso. The rest of the town is quiet, comparatively empty and almost wholly mediæval. The streets between the Corso and the walls are paved, narrow and full of shade because the buildings are high, while they wander about among the quaint old houses as if they had lost their way.

The town in its general disposal and appearance can have altered but little since the days of the story. Pompilia would find her way to the San Clemente Gate without missing a turning and without seeing a great deal that would be new to her. Even old Pietro Comparini—if he could come to life again—would have no great difficulty in following the devious lanes and by-ways that led to his favourite tavern. Many of the houses in the old town are very dignified, a few are magnificent and nearly all present some feature which makes them picturesque. I have failed to discover where the Franceschini Palace stood, but there are houses enough which would fit, in varying detail, with one's conception of that melancholy dwelling. One such house is shown, on the left-hand side of the roadway, in Plate 34, while the lane itself would be just such a one as Caponsacchi strolled through on the eventful occasion when he dropped the handkerchief (p. 43). There are many walled gardens within the little town, many unexpected squares and strange entries, the beautiful Abbey of San Fiore and nearly half a score

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

of churches, all centuries old, which have altered in no essential since the time when Pompilia went sobbing along the street to seek comfort from the bishop. The little countess would find the Piazza Grande scarcely changed at all since the time when she loitered in the cool shadows of Vasari's Logge to admire the Madonna over the great doorway of the Brotherhood of Pity, and yet the Madonna was already two hundred years old when Pompilia first came to Arezzo.

Within the cathedral she would see little that was not wholly familiar, and could look once more upon

"Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle" ;

but the outside of the building she would notice to be somewhat changed ; for although the façade was commenced in 1277, its completion—so leisurely have been the builders—was not undertaken until 1901.

The most picturesque church in Arezzo is Caponsacchi's church, Santa Maria della Pieve. It stands at the top of the Corso, just at the point where the shops cease and where the road becomes narrow and steep, and strangely quiet (Plate 35). The crude, rough, square campanile, with its storeys of round-headed windows, was built in 1216, and has been for just upon seven hundred years a familiar landmark in the valley. It is an impressive symbol of simplicity and rugged strength. The façade of the church was erected at the same time as the great bell-tower, and is as delicate, as richly adorned, as feminine as the tower is plain, masculine and lusty. This western front of the church presents four storeys of arcades, where pillar and arch are made beautiful by most exquisite masons' work. The stone is grey with age and



65.—THE BRIDGE AT BASTIA CROSSED IN THE PROCESS OF FLIGHT.





## Arezzo

very weather-worn, while so narrow is the road and so lofty the church that this vast front would appear to have been chiselled out of the face of a cliff.

Above the central door of the church is the figure of the Virgin, clad in a very fine embroidered gown with long sleeves and with a crown on her head. Through this door must have passed at one time or another all the chief actors in the story: Count Guido and his shrinking wife, Caponsacchi and the genial Conti, Donna Beatrice and the false Maria Margherita Contenti, the Abate Paolo with the foxy face, Violante Comparini and old Pietro, Venerino from the Canale Inn, and possibly also the four murderers when they made a Sabbath day's journey from Vitiano to their master's town (Plate 36).

In the archivolt above the Madonna are some quaintly carved figures illustrating the months of the year. These cannot fail to have interested Pompilia as she walked under the archway. If one recalls the details and seasons of the story certain of these little figures are curiously apt. For example, April gathers a flower, and it may be that Caponsacchi would remember this conceit and glory in it during the dull hours of his banishment. May takes a journey on horseback, and one wonders if the road traversed lay between Arezzo and Rome? December is engaged in killing a pig, and from records one knows that Guido regarded Violante as something lower than a pig.

The interior of the Pieve is peculiarly impressive. Most of the churches in Italy are too lavishly decorated within, are overlaid with gilt and brilliant colours, are adorned with images and pictures, are hung with vast

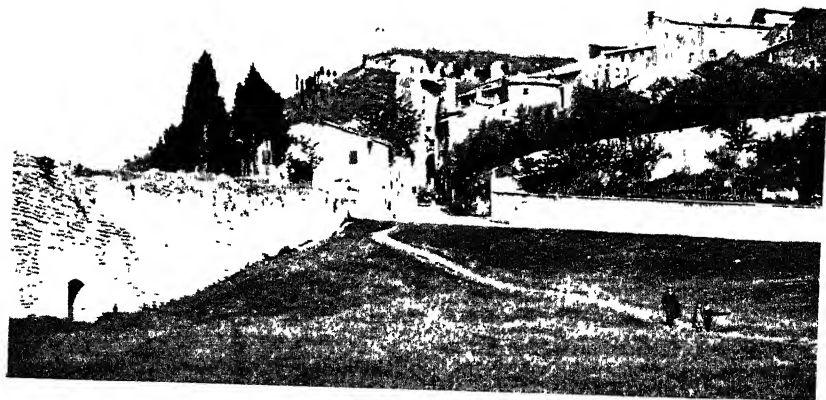
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

candelabra and present a number of side chapels which vie with one another in gaudy magnificence. Here is a church superb in its simplicity and as austere as a great hall in a fortress. It is entirely free from all decoration, from monuments, from pictures and from ornate furniture. It is wholly grey, for there is not a patch of colour in it. The grey may be deepened by shadow or brightened by a ray of sun; it may vary in tint as the stone is smooth in one place or made rough by decay in another, but it is always grey. On each side of the huge nave are grey stone pillars of enormous height. The altar is raised upon a platform, so that it seems to occupy the dais in a judgment hall; the immense paved floor is absolutely bare, and, indeed, the sole evidence of the human presence on the occasion of my first visit was a solitary chair against the wall with a white surplice thrown over it. It is no wonder if Pompilia was oppressed with the profound solemnity of this place, with its ascetic harshness, its coldness, its cavernous gloom. It was so utterly unlike her own particular church in Rome—the gay, bright, much gilded, much painted little Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina. It can be understood how it was that after a long service in this severe basilica she felt, when she stepped out into the sunshine again, that she must run away, and why it was that she fled to the bishop to beg him help her to escape.

Outside the entrance to Santa Maria della Pieve is a paved terrace with a stone balustrade around it (Plate 36). It is a favourite lounging place when the service of the church is over, because it commands a view of the Corso both up and down the hill, and allows



66.—DISTANT VIEW OF THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY  
OF THE ANGELS.



67.—ASSISI, FROM THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO



## Arezzo

of a scrutiny of the worshippers as they disperse at the terrace steps. No gossiping is more keenly favoured than that which engages the little groups outside a church while the congregation is pouring forth, and while the smell of incense still hangs in the air. Many a gaping youth must have waited shyly on this terrace to see the little countess go by with her boor of a husband, for there is no doubt that the Franceschini household was the subject of much comment.

Opposite the church is an old stone building of some pretence, which was once the Canale Inn. It was here that Caponsacchi obtained the horses for the journey, as well as the services of the driver, Francesco Borsi, otherwise Venerino, who was destined to spend so many months in the city jail. This ancient house is now an old curiosity shop, but it shows still the great arched doorway of the tavern and the liberal proportions of the place. The entrance leads into a huge, heavy apartment, which one may assume was the common room of the inn. From the fine row of windows on the first floor it is to be gathered that the upper rooms of the house are of no mean proportions (Plate 37).

So far as the present matter is concerned, the chief interest in Arezzo is associated with the particulars of the flight of Pompilia and the priest. It will be remembered that they escaped on the night of the last Sunday in April, 1697, or rather early on the morning of Monday, the 29th, because it was not until after midnight that Pompilia crept out of her husband's house. Venerino, with a carriage and two horses from the Canale Inn, had left the town on Sunday evening,

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book."

before the gates were closed, and was instructed to be in waiting for the fugitives outside the San Clemente Gate. The particular time for the flight was not ill arranged. Easter was well over, for in the year 1697 Easter Day fell on April 14th. The night was dark, since the moon was just approaching its first quarter. By the use of the Metonic Cycle it appears that the day of the new moon was April 23rd, so that before the carriage was well on the road the moon, with its feeble light, would have set.

Now the direct way to Rome was by the Perugia Road, which leaves the south part of the town at the San Spirito Gate. The question at once arises why did Caponsacchi order the carriage to be in waiting at the San Clemente Gate, which is at the north end of the town, and at the farthest possible point from the Perugia Road? The answer is clear—the city gates were all closed, and at some spot or another the wall had to be scaled. Now, the walls of Arezzo are of considerable height, and at the San Spirito Gate are as impossible to climb on the inside as they are on the outside. The Yellow Book, however, says, "As the gates of the city were closed, they climbed the wall on the hill of the Torrione, and having reached the Horse Inn, outside the Gate San Clemente, they were there awaited by a two-horse carriage."

The San Clemente Gate is a plain, simple gate, with one entrance only, closed by massive and ancient wooden doors. The stonework of the gate has been restored, but the general features of the entry are undisturbed. Beyond the gate is the open country; indeed, the cornfields and the olive trees come up to

## Arezzo

the very foot of the wall. It so happens that there is an inn just outside the gate, but it is quite modern, while of the Horse Inn of Pompilia's time no trace is to be found (Plate 38).

Standing inside the town, it will be noticed that the wall to the left of the gate is as high and as sheer on the side of the city as it is on the side that looks outwards. On the right hand of the gate, however, the ground within the town rises in the form of a hill, so that the summit of the wall can be reached to within a few feet (see Plate 39). No trace of this hill exists outside the ramparts.

At the top of this hill a great bastion stands out from the face of the main wall (see Map 33 and Plate 40). Its purpose is obviously to protect the San Clemente Gate. On the top of the bastion are certain masses of masonry, which shows that it was once surmounted by a tower or defensive work of some kind. This is the *Torrione*, or Great Tower, and the hill that leads up to it within the wall is the "Hill of the *Torrione*" mentioned in the Yellow Book. It will be seen from Plate 40 that there is a window on one face of the bastion which evidently lit some room in the base of the tower. It is apparent from the illustrations that there would be no difficulty to-day in climbing the wall at the *Torrione* at the point where it was scaled by the young countess and the able-bodied priest (Plate 41). The drop on the other side of the wall, however, is very considerable, and one can only suppose that at the time of the flight there must have been some heaps of rubbish outside the wall, made up possibly of stones from the ruined or dismantled tower.

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The top of this bastion, or tower, is singularly picturesque, for the irregular masses of stone are overgrown with weeds, and these, together with a cluster of bushes, have converted the old stronghold into a wild garden. A garrison, and a strong garrison, still holds this redoubt, inasmuch as the garden is given over to bees. Scattered everywhere among the green are hives. Some of these aim at reproducing the frame hive of the modern bee-keeper, but the greater number of them are hives of a kind that Pompilia would be familiar with, for they are made of a log of rough wood hollowed out, and provided at one end with an entrance for the bees. These uncouth, archaic log hives are no doubt more ancient than even the humble skep.

A road runs round outside the town from the San Clemente Gate to the Porta San Spirito, and this is the road the fugitives followed. The San Spirito Gate has been pulled down and has been replaced by a barrier, rather notable for its ugliness, called the *Barriera Vittorio Emanuele*. So both the old gate and the old name have gone to meet the needs of modern "improvements."





68.—ASSISI, FROM THE ROAD.  
The Great Building to the Left is the Franciscan Monastery



## IV

### THE FLIGHT TO ROME

#### 1. THE ROAD

THE distance from Arezzo to Rome by Foligno and the Via Flaminia is  $154\frac{3}{4}$  miles. There are other roads, of course, between the city and the Tuscan town. The shortest is by Todi and Narni, but it does not seem to have been what the Italians call "carriageable" at the end of the seventeenth century. Another road—and an old road—is by way of Chiusi and Orvieto. This road was apparently not much used in the past, as is evident from the narratives of travellers who were visiting Italy about the time with which the story is concerned. I have made trial of these routes between Arezzo and Rome, and can affirm that, in the light of modern requirements, the Foligno Road is the most agreeable and, on the whole, the most easy. The road is described in the Yellow Book as "the shortest route" and is spoken of as "the Consular Road"—the road, that is, made by the Consul Flaminius (p. 154). The Via Flaminia comes down from Rimini, and joins the Perugia Road at Foligno. Foligno was an important point in the route of flight, because the two runaways were charged with having spent the night together in that town on their way to Rome.

The Flaminian Road was the one almost invariably followed by travellers who were seeking the Eternal

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

City from the northern parts of Europe. De Brosses made use of it on his return journey from Rome because, in his opinion, "the route from Siena to Rome was simply infamous." Father Montfaucon, who travelled from Rome to Arezzo in March, 1700, took this road and occupied nine days on the journey, one Sunday being necessarily included.\*

The Earl of Perth after his long imprisonment in Stirling Castle pursued this road on his way to Rome in the spring of 1695.†

Goethe, too, when he visited Rome in October, 1786, came by Arezzo, Perugia, Foligno and Civita Castellana. It is noteworthy that the carriage journey from Perugia to Rome occupied him no less than six days, although he travelled in haste, since his "anxiety to see Rome was so great."‡ This will serve to show at what exceptional speed the journey of Pompilia and the priest was carried out. More interesting still is the fact that Robert Browning and his wife made the journey from Florence to Rome by way of Assisi and Terni in the winter of 1854.§ This was six years before the *Yellow Book* came into the poet's possession. They travelled, of course, by carriage, and were eight days on the road. The more direct route from Florence to Rome is by Siena and Radicofani, but they were probably anxious to avoid the hills in the neighbourhood of those towns. It is not clear whether the

\* "The Travels of the learned Father Montfaucon." London, 1712.

† "Letters of James, Earl of Perth." London, Camden Society, 1845.

‡ "Goethe's Travels in Italy." London, 1885, p. 114.

§ "Life of Robert Browning." By Mrs. Sutherland Orr. London, 1891.



69.—THE OLD POSTING-HOUSE AT SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI,  
Showing the Church in the distance.



## The Road

Brownings reached Assisi by Chiusi or by Arezzo, but certain it is that for the greater part of the journey they followed, unknowingly, the footsteps of Pompilia.

The details of the journey from Arezzo to Rome by the route followed by Caponsacchi are to be gathered from sundry road books dealing with this part of Italy. The two most convenient of these books are "*Direzione pe' Viaggiatori in Italia*," by Gio. Sassi, published at Bologna in 1771, and "*La Vera Guida per chi Viaggia in Italia*," issued in Rome, in Italian and French, in 1787. Although these works are of later date than the period with which we are concerned, they are of practical service, since posting-stations, being determined by the position of towns and villages and the capacity of the post-horse, cannot have varied much since even earlier times. This is made evident by the "*Itinerario d'Italia*," by Francesco Scoto, published in Padua in 1670, where the posting-road from Perugia to Rome is precisely as here given, although the names of two or three of the stations are modified. The two guides above named are provided with road maps, which are not unlike the motor road maps of the present day, save in this, that they show where the traveller can obtain horses in the place of petrol. They give some account of the road, and of places of interest by the way (Plates 49 and 75).

"*La Vera Guida*" is singularly complete in its information. It commences with two prayers, which it recommends as suitable for the traveller. It then embarks upon some very serious moral advice, in which the reader is urged to avoid people of depraved morals,

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

to decline to play cards with strangers, and not to make acquaintances lightly. Very elaborate instructions are given on the subject of highwaymen and footpads, and on the course to be pursued when the traveller encounters either wolves or bears. It is pointed out, with all the appearance of originality, that a provision of money is necessary, and that a little knowledge of surgery, with something more than a speculative knowledge of diseases, is useful. The book is not one to be recommended to the nervous tourist. The reader is advised, before entering his carriage, to take "*quelque corroboratif pour fortifier son estomac*," as the jolting which is inevitable engenders vomiting; and is implored, when he sleeps in the open, to see that he is not exposed to the rays of the moon, as such exposure may cause him to become insane. Some pages are occupied with counsel as to the treatment of the driver or postilion. These sections, which are very full, were evidently written by a shrewd man of the world, who had no mean knowledge of stable hands. His method of dealing with impertinence in underlings is worthy of a diplomatist.

Along the road were certain post-stations, where alone horses, either for riding or for the carriage, could be obtained. The journey, therefore, resolved itself into a question of the various halting places, and of the distances between them. The actual number of miles between one station and the next varied considerably. It might be about six miles, as from Prima Porta to Rome, or about seventeen miles, as from Arezzo to Camoscia. The journey, however, was reckoned not by miles but by so many "posts," each post representing



## The Road

the same definite payment for the hire of horses. Thus, the journey from Prima Porta to Rome was reckoned as one post, the journey from Arezzo to Camoscia as a post and a half, and that from Civita Castellana to Borghetto, a distance of three and three-quarter miles, as three-quarters of a post.

The actual distance represented by a "post" varied considerably, and was to some extent influenced by the character of the road. The average distance was about eight miles. In the same district of Italy, one journey of eight posts represents sixty-two miles, while another journey of eight posts covers only fifty-four miles. The first stage traversed on leaving any capital town was called a "Posta Reale," and was charged at the rate of a post and a half.

The distance from Arezzo to Castelnuovo by the road in question is  $138\frac{3}{4}$  miles, the posting-stations on the way, at which the horses were changed, are fourteen in number, while the number of "posts" the traveller would be required to pay amounts to fifteen and a half. These matters are set forth on p. 178. The charge for horses per post varied in Italy from fifteen to eight paoli, according to the country traversed. This represented the payment for the horses only, and did not include any part of the charge for the carriage, the postilion, or the driver. Pompilia in her flight passed through only two countries, viz. Tuscany and the States of the Church. In both these parts of Italy the charge per post for two carriage horses was eight paoli or Pauls.\*

The value of the paolo may be put down as five-

\* The charge for one saddle horse was three paoli.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

pence; the amount, therefore, that Caponsacchi would be required to pay for post-horses between Arezzo and Castelnuovo would amount to about £2 10s. in English currency of the present day.

The carriage used in the flight is described as a "calesse," or "covered carriage." The calash, as it is termed in English, is a light carriage with low wheels, capable of seating four persons inside, and with a separate seat for the driver. It is provided with a covering or hood, which was in some examples fixed, in others capable of being removed. The calesse, or calash, is shown in many old prints and pictures belonging to the period of the story.\* The awning or canopy is supported by four uprights, is square and very often dome-topped. In some instances the driver sits within the canopy, and could, therefore, see the occupants of the carriage. In other forms of the calesse the driver's seat is outside the awning, which then covered in the carriage on four sides. If it was in such a calesse that the priest and the lady travelled, it is clear that the testimony of Venerino, the driver, on the matter of the kissing is rendered still less convincing.

The distance from Arezzo to Castelnuovo is, as already stated,  $138\frac{3}{4}$  miles. Assuming that the two fugitives left Arezzo at 1 a.m. on the morning of Monday, April 29th, and reached Castelnuovo at 7 p.m. on the evening of Tuesday, the 30th, the journey would have occupied them forty-two hours. If they travelled without stopping the whole way, a pace of a little

\* See for example the plates in the "Itinerario d'Italia," by Scoto, published in Padua, 1670.



79.—A STREET IN SPOLETO.



80 —THE CASTLE ABOVE STRETTURA



## The Road

over three miles an hour would be involved, but allowing that they stopped one hour at each of the fourteen posting-stations passed on the road, then the pace would be represented by about five miles an hour.

It is doubtful if, in actual fact, they went quite so fast. The roads were mediæval, and although for a considerable part of the journey the way was fairly level, there were a number of serious hills to be climbed. Guido, who pursued the runaways on horseback, reached Castelnovo some nine or ten hours after they did, yet, although mounted, the pace at which he travelled could hardly have exceeded that of the couple in the carriage. If it be assumed that Pompilia's escape was not discovered by the household until about seven in the morning, she would have gained a start of six hours. Then would follow a hurried family council *en déshabillé*, and the scurry of messengers sent hither and thither to find out in which direction the little countess had fled. Finally, a posting permit and a horse had to be obtained, a sum of money had to be got together, and other preparations made for a long and indefinite journey. It is probable, therefore, that it was not until some nine or ten hours after Pompilia had stepped out into the street on tiptoe that Guido thundered through the San Spirito Gate on his way to Rome.

The following are the post-stations between Arezzo and Castelnovo, together with the distance in English miles between each halting-place and the number of "posts" the traveller would have to pay at the various stages.

# The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Arezzo to—				MILES		POSTS CHARGED
Camoscia	...	...	...	17	...	$1\frac{1}{2}$
Torricella	...	...	...	16	...	$1\frac{1}{2}$
Perugia	...	...	...	13	...	1
Madonna degli Angeli	...	...	...	$11\frac{1}{2}$	...	1
Foligno	...	...	...	$9\frac{3}{8}$	...	1
Vene	...	...	...	$9\frac{3}{8}$	...	1
Spoletto	...	...	...	7	...	1
Strettura	...	...	...	$8\frac{3}{4}$	...	1
Terni	...	...	...	$7\frac{1}{2}$	...	1
Narni	...	...	...	$7\frac{1}{2}$	...	1
Otricoli	...	...	...	$8\frac{3}{4}$	...	1
Borghetto	...	...	...	$6\frac{1}{4}$	...	$\frac{3}{4}$
Civita Castellana	...	...	...	$3\frac{3}{4}$	...	$\frac{3}{4}$
Rignano	...	...	...	$6\frac{1}{4}$	...	1
Castelnuovo	...	...	...	7	...	1
				<u><u><math>138\frac{8}{4}</math></u></u>		<u><u><math>15\frac{1}{2}</math></u></u>

## 2. FROM AREZZO TO PERUGIA

THE road from Arezzo to Foligno, and, indeed, right on to Spoleto, a distance of over eighty miles, may be described as practically level, since it follows a succession of plains which are only for a moment interrupted by the tumbled country which lies between Lake Trasimene and Perugia. To the left of the road, and quite near to it for most of the way, are the foothills of the Apennines; while to the right is the vast even plain which in some places, on a misty day, appears to be as boundless as the ocean. This is what Goethe terms "the splendid plain of Arezzo." Splendid it certainly is in its immensity and in the solid mass of colour that fills it—a vivid green in the spring, a grey umber in the winter time.

The country is in good heart, for every acre of the huge expanse is elaborately cultivated; all the woods have been cut down; all the rough places made smooth; with the result that the land has become like a great garden, prim, formal, artificial, and, it must be owned, to some degree monotonous. A vineyard in full leaf, under an Italian sun, is a beautiful object; but when that vineyard extends for eighty miles, or is only broken here and there by a league or so of olive trees, the eye wearies of it and the mind is dulled by satiation.

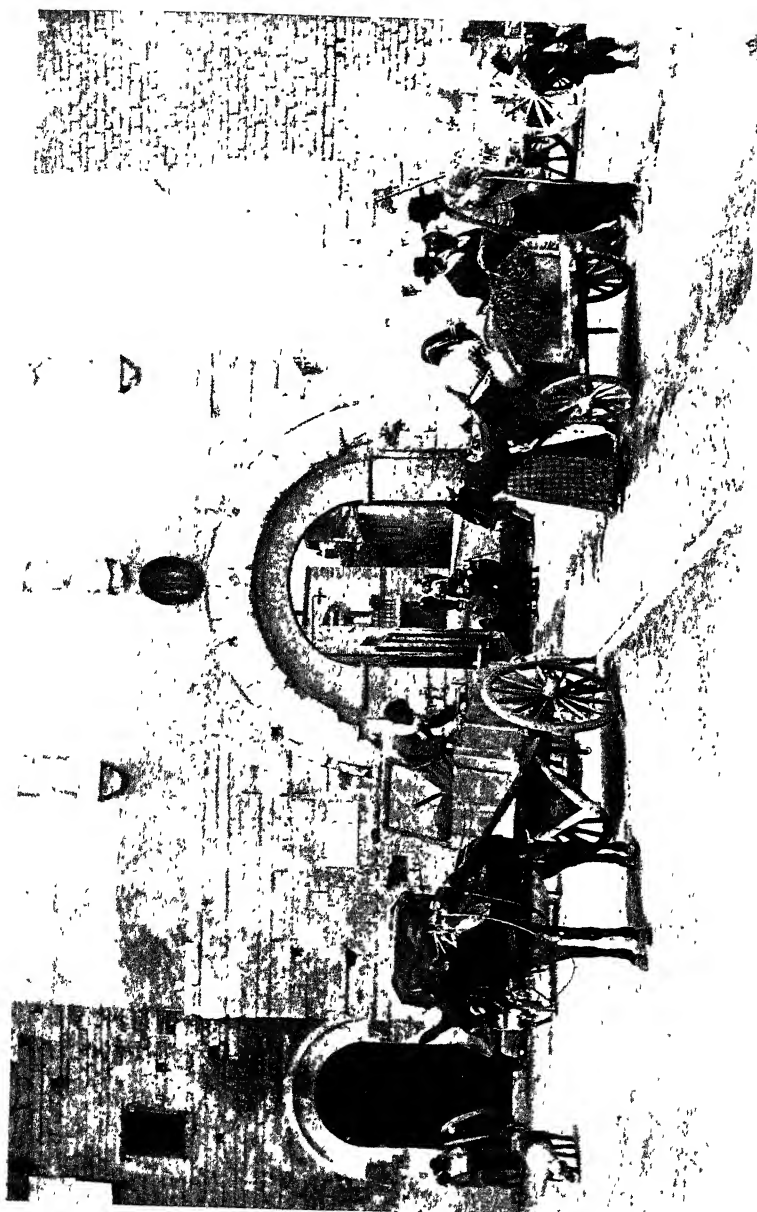
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

The vine in this quarter of Italy is grown, for the most part, on trees, on mulberry trees or on some form of maple. These trees are made slaves of, are trees of burden, whose sole purpose in life is to provide spreading branches for the vine to cling to. They are pruned to the limits of deformity, are robbed of any character of freedom or joyous living, and are more like rustic candelabra, fashioned out of gnarled wood, than trees. In the winter time, when the vine is a mere distorted stick, these trees look like skeleton hands coming out of the earth, with horribly knotted fingers and long lean wrists. They are then unpleasant to look upon, being so misshapen, so mutilated, so tortured, so untree-like.

At the commencement of May, at the time when Pompilia passed along the road, the vines are at their loveliest. They are by no means fully grown, and are, indeed, only just beginning to form festoons from tree to tree; but the leaves are wonderful, being in tint a light yellowish green, as if each leaf had been dipped in gold. They appear to be almost translucent, and to cast no shadow, to be almost luminous, so that even when the sky is clouded they seem to reflect the sun. These vines stand knee-deep in young corn, and among the corn will be scarlet poppies.

The crops that, in squares and alleys and lanes, cover every segment of the ground, are at their prettiest, for the peas and the beans are in flower, while everything that grows is young, luscious, sprightly and eager, and every stream and rivulet is full. In this carnival of spring in Italy is to be seen, spread out like a carpet on the earth, every tint of green that





71.—THE GATE OF SPELLO.



## From Arezzo to Perugia

the mind of a painter ever imagined, from the lettuce green of the baby crop to the sturdy middle-aged green of the bay tree and the wizened green of the ancient, shrunken, patriarchal olive. The young leaves of the poplar tree are of so pallid a green that they appear to be lit by moonlight, while the leaves of the acanthus are of so deep a hue that one imagines they will be black by the autumn.

As a relief to this flood of green there will be a few patches of chocolate-brown earth, still unsown, a field of claret-coloured clover, a mound of yellow broom, a dome of white acacia trees in blossom, a little stone town on a hill, a red-tiled cottage and a hedge of pink and white wild roses. Every roadside, every gully, every hedgerow and spinney are brilliant with flowers, but the most beautiful sight that Umbria can display in the early spring—a sight that Pompilia must have paused to look upon—is a field of flax with poppies in it. The flax forms a sheet of forget-me-not blue, as level as a pool; while deep in the pool—as if submerged in this amazing blue—are a thousand scarlet cups.

Travellers in Italy in the spring have described in language, almost extravagant, this road from Arezzo to Perugia. Its wonderful charm none will dispute, but it must not be supposed that because it is much frequented it is the most beautiful highway in Umbria. In picturesqueness and in variety it is far surpassed by the road from Arezzo to Florence, by way of Montevarchi, the Val d'Arno, and the mouth of Vallombrosa, as well as by the road from Perugia to Gubbio, through the town of Umbertide.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

To return to the road traversed by the Countess Franceschini. Eight and three-quarter miles from Arezzo the little hamlet of Vitiano is passed. It was here that Count Guido had a vineyard, and it was from this place that he obtained the four field labourers who were to assist him in the murder of his invalid wife and her aged foster parents. Vitiano consists of a few scattered houses by the roadside (Plate 43), of a tiny church, recently built, and of some well-to-do farms. It is on a slope at the foot of the hills, and is surrounded by a fertile country where, in addition to vineyards, are orchards, olive groves and gardens. It is a very humble settlement, with no suggestion of villainy about it, and with nothing to mark it as the birthplace of murderers.

Some two miles beyond Vitiano is the town of Castiglion Fiorentino, the first town that the fugitives would pass on their way to Rome (Plate 45). It is proudly placed upon an isolated hill, looking at the distance like a pile of square blocks of stone surmounted by a lofty tower. The road does not enter the town, but sweeps round the bottom of the hill. It would be when the night was at its darkest that the priest and the lady passed Castiglion. Save for a glimmer of light in a window or two the town would be a mere heap of blackness, but the runaways would be cheered by the thought that they were already more than ten miles from the terrible city of Arezzo.

Another thing that would cheer them through the night would be the song of the nightingale, for this part of Italy is much favoured by that bird, while his song can be heard all along the way,

## From Arezzo to Perugia

and even from such windows in Perugia as overlook the walls.

A little way beyond Castiglion it is just possible that the two would catch a glimpse of the huge fortress of Montecchio, standing up on the left of the road as a dark battlemented mass against the dull sky. It is a fine and gallant place by daylight, a brown fortress on a low hill with a defiant tower in its centre, and with many minor towers along its vast walls.

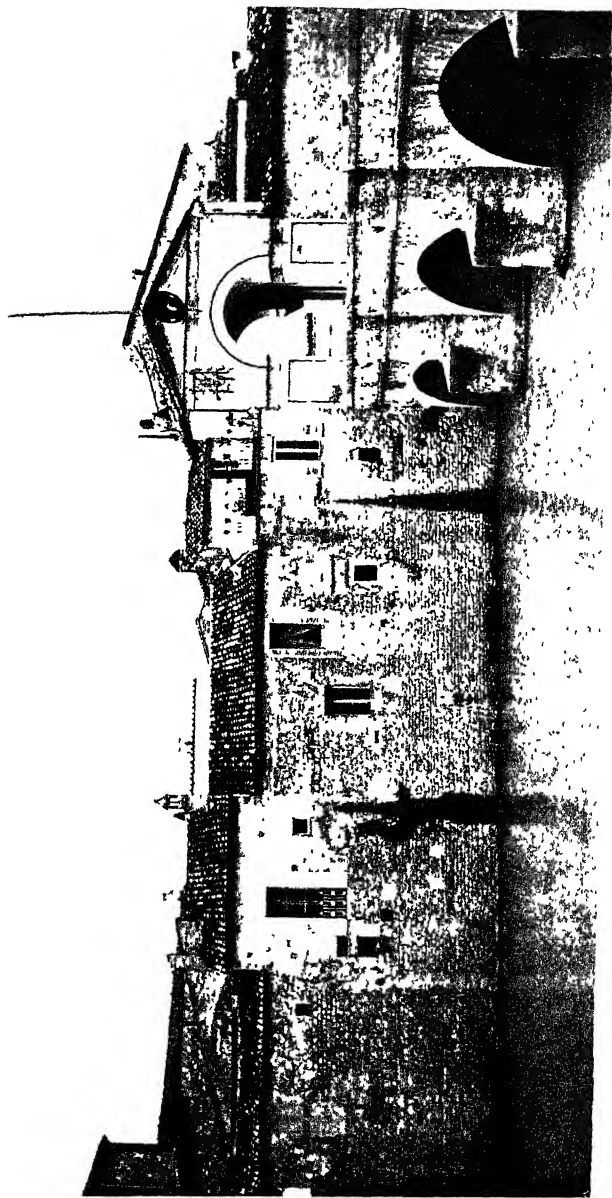
The first halting place for the change of horses was Camoscia, or, as the modern maps spell it, Camucia. This little village is seventeen miles from Arezzo, on a road that is level all the way. Pompilia and her friend would arrive here about half-past four in the morning. As the carriage drew up at the inn the little lady's heart would almost stop, as it would seem that their headlong rush to Rome was checked. Here Venerino left them to return to the Canale Inn, little suspecting that he was to spend the whole of the summer in jail simply because he had driven two people seventeen miles on the way to Perugia. While Caponsacchi was busy about the stables it is probable that Pompilia would walk a little way back on the road until, clear of the noisy bustle at the inn, she could listen for the dreaded sound of pursuing hoofs coming from the direction of Arezzo.

Camoscia is a straggling and quite modern village, strongly suburban in type, which has arisen about the railway station of Cortona; for Camoscia lies at the foot of the hill on the summit of which Cortona stands. On the side towards Arezzo, however, there are traces of the old village, in the form of houses of such apparent

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age that they must have been in existence in Pompilia's time. Among these it is not possible to identify with any assurance the site of the old posting-house. The building that can with most probability claim this distinction is shown in Plate 46. It is an ancient house covered with grey-green tiles and surmounted by a square stone pigeon cote of a type common in the district. It is now a farmhouse, but its ample stabling and general disposition suggest that it was at one time the first "post" out of Arezzo. It is old enough to have received Venerino and his pair of horses, while certain it is that it was at such a house as this that the carriage drew up at the end of the first long stage.

The day would be dawning when the eager couple reached Camoscia, and the growing light in the sky would give heart to the little countess. High up on the summit and slope of a hill, to the left of the road, she would see Cortona. The ponderous walls, the house tops, the towers and domes of that mysterious city would stand up black against the rosy glow of the dawn, for it is behind the mountains about Cortona that the sun rises. Cortona stands at a height of nearly 1,300 feet above the level of the road, and is approached from Camoscia by a very steep, winding causeway, three miles in length. Cortona is—as the guide books insist—one of the very oldest cities in Italy, for it was the principal stronghold of the Etruscans. Its cyclopean walls still stand, and it still looks, in every line of it, the impregnable mountain fortress (Plate 47). The air of mystery about the place is due to the fact that the city is of the same hue as the rocky hill from



72.—FOLIGNO: THE GATE INTO THE TOWN FROM THE PERUGIA ROAD.





## From Arezzo to Perugia

which it springs, so that it is not always easy to tell bastion from precipice. The town seems to grow out of the hill; there are strange, menacing structures and forbidding entries here and there along the walls, while within the city are those narrow, winding streets, those dark lanes and secretive alleys, which are associated with a cloaked figure and rapier type of romance (Plate 48).

Probably no part of the long journey would give such comfort to Pompilia as the beautiful road between Cortona and Perugia, which latter town she and her friend would reach about noon. They would pass through this delectable country in the early morning, would hear the note of the cuckoo and would watch the sun flood the great plain around Lake Trasimene.

About five miles south of Cortona they would reach the frontier, and, having once crossed it, would feel a little more secure. The frontier between Tuscany and the States of the Church is marked by no especial object. It lies just beyond the uninteresting village of Terontola—the last place in Tuscany—and is indicated by Monte Gualandro, on the summit of which is an ancient fortress for the defence of the border (Plate 50).

A little way across the frontier the fugitives would come to a sudden bend in the road, and would there obtain their first view of Lake Trasimene (Plates 51 and 52). They must assuredly have halted for a moment at this spot to rest the horses, for it is at the top of a hill, and Caponsacchi would have much to say about the memories with which this particular

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part of Italy is associated. Moreover, the sudden view of the great lake is so bewitching and so peaceful that Pompilia and her friend, hurried and harried as they were, must have paused here to take comfort from the sight.

The lake covers some fifty square miles and has a circumference of over thirty miles. Its rounded outline can be made out from the road; its surface, when the sun is shining, is a delicate faint blue, while all about it is a circle of dim hills. A mist so frequently hangs over the lake that the opposite shore—although it is only eight and a half miles distant—can seldom be clearly seen. The actual shores are flat and fringed with reeds, so that the title of "reedy Thrasymene," that Macaulay gives it, is singularly fitting. These reeds in the early spring form a bright green border to the lake, which is in exquisite contrast to the pale blue water. In the winter time the reeds are a ruddy yellow, and at a distance give the impression that the shores of the mere are of level sand. The sloping banks of the lake are for the most part covered with olive groves, which complete the wonderful variation in dim colours that make Trasimene so beautiful. I have never seen the lake at any time, either in the winter or in the spring, when it has not shown a surface as smooth as a mirror, and thus it is that Trasimene in a gale is to me beyond conception.

From the bend of the road two low islands are to be seen on the lake, the one to the right being Isola Maggiore and the other the Isola Minore. Caponsacchi cannot have failed to remind his lady that on one of these islets Saint Francis of Assisi fasted for forty days

## From Arezzo to Perugia

and forty nights, during which time he ate no more than half a loaf.

This particular turn in the road has another interest which would probably have occupied Pompilia but little. The highway at this corner enters a defile, or narrowed strait, lying between the hills on the left and the lake on the right. The pass—if it can be so called—soon widens out into a modest plain, but at Passignano, five miles farther along the road, the hills come so close to the water's edge again that a second pass, narrower than the first, is encountered on the way. Thus it is that between Borghetto—where is the bend in the road—and Passignano, which is on the water's edge, there is a semicircular bay of fairly level ground between the hills and the lake, which bay is shut in by a narrow strait, or defile, at either end. In the widest part of the amphitheatre so enclosed are a village called Tuoro and a minute hamlet named Sanguinetto.

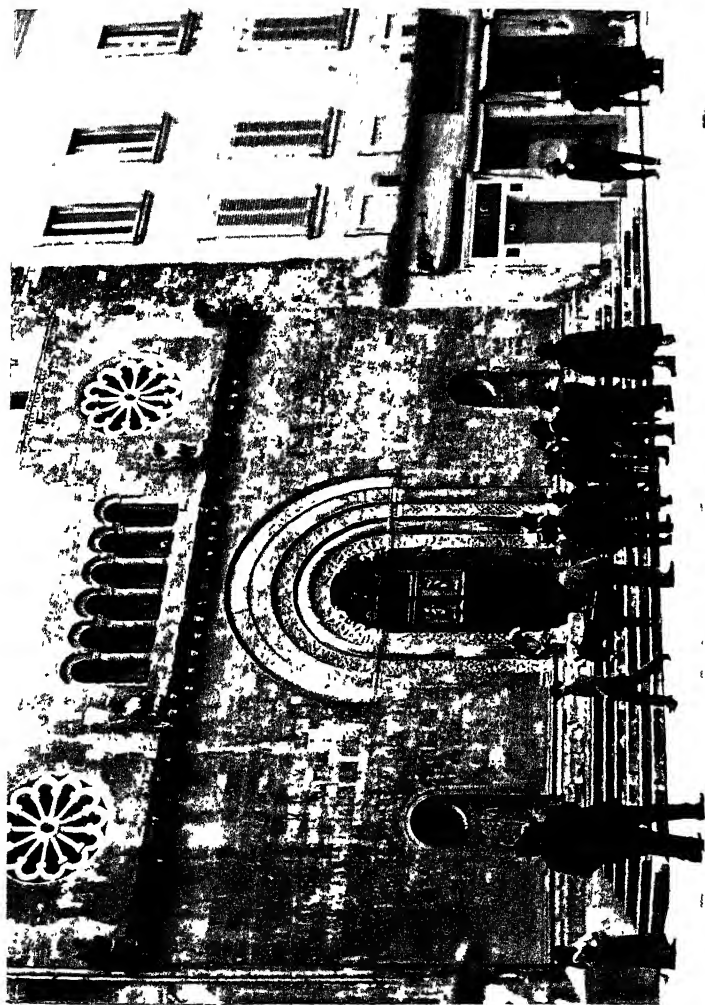
The interest attaching to these data carries us back to the spring of the year B.C. 217, when Rome and Carthage were at war. Hannibal, the Carthaginian, had left his winter quarters in Gaul, had crossed the Apennines and the Arno, and was making his way towards Rome. The Roman army under the Consul Flaminius was stationed at Arezzo. Hannibal passed to the west of that town in the direction of Lake Trasimene. Flaminius, with his whole army, incautiously pursued him. The Carthaginians entered the defile at Borghetto and concealed themselves among the hills between the two passes. The consul reached the lake in the early morning to find the country enveloped in mist. Seeing nothing of the enemy, he recklessly assumed that

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Hannibal was hurrying on to Rome. He boldly entered the fatal defile with his entire army, and when the whole force was well in the trap Hannibal rushed down upon him from the hills. The pass at either end was already secured and the massacre began. The only course open to Flaminius was to endeavour to force a passage by Passignano. The main onslaught was in the open ground at the foot of the hill upon which the village of Tuoro now stands. Here was fought the great and decisive battle of Lake Trasimene, the result of which was an overwhelming disaster to Rome. Flaminius lost no fewer than fifteen thousand men and was himself killed, while only six thousand Romans succeeded in forcing a way by Passignano, and even these were compelled to surrender on the following morning.

Such then is the interest that attaches to this bend in the road, for it represents the entrance to the deadly defile which sealed the fate of the Romans at Trasimene. It is said that the waters of the lake were discoloured with blood, and that the name Sanguineto survives in memory of the fact. Plate 54 shows the village of Tuoro as seen from the road, together with the level ground in front of it, where raged the centre of the battle. In the museum of the Palazzo Pretorio at Cortona is a plan of the battlefield of Lake Trasimene, drawn in 1794 by some enthusiast, who evidently knew every foot of the ground and had studied the inevitable disposition of the various troops engaged.

Passignano, where the six thousand cut their way through, is a little fisher town on the very edge of



73.—THE CATHEDRAL OF SAN FELIZIANO, FOLIGNO,  
On the way through the Town.



## From Arezzo to Perugia

the lake. Indeed, it seems to be standing in the water. It has about it the odour which is common to all fisher towns, but it is none the less charming on that account. On the hill above the town is a great castle with a tower, both well stricken in years and more or less ruinous, while at the water's edge, among the reeds, are boats, nets hanging up to dry and all the untidy belongings of the fisherman's craft (Plate 53).

The road now follows the level shore of the lake running among the olive groves, the little fields of corn and the wonderful company of flowers which here come down to the very water's edge. In some places the poppies—the boldest of all flowers—seem to have made their way even among the reeds which make tremulous the margin of the mere.

Where the road leaves the lake to climb the steep hill (which forms the side of the basin in which Trasimene lies) is the hamlet of Torricella. Now, Torricella is the next posting-station to Camoscia, and is sixteen miles distant from that place. It is the last post before Perugia. Curious to say, Torricella is hard to find and can be very easily passed by. The reason is this: in order to make the ascent of the hill more easy a new road has been cut along the hillside from the level of the lake to the summit of the height which towers above it. It thus comes to pass that a certain section of the old road is left derelict, and on this deserted highway the little village of Torricella is placed. So here is preserved, as an ancient relic, a part of the original roadway, unaltered and undisturbed, together with a humble

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

settlement which has escaped the progress of modern times and has remained as it was long years ago. The road is narrow and neglected, while Torricella, by the world forgotten, is a dear old grandmotherly hamlet of some half a dozen houses asleep by the margin of the lake (Plate 55). But for one recently erected building all the houses in this isolated hamlet are of ancient date, are small and humble, are roofed with fine tiles and are shaded in odd corners by a fig tree or two, or a rough pergola with a vine. In the centre of the village, high up on a wall, and protected by a penthouse with a heavily tiled roof, a great Madonna is painted, while beneath this Our Lady of Torricella is the date, MCCCCCI.

In 1501 Henry VII. was King of England, so, although the inhabitants draw attention to the painting with gushing pride, it is no matter of wonder that in four hundred years the colours have become so faint, and the Lady so indistinct, that there is little left to admire but a grey shadow on a wall.

The posting-house where Pompilia and Caponsacchi halted is still in existence, and is nearly as highly prized as the picture of the Madonna. It is a long, low house with just one bedroom floor, which is approached by a stone stair of some pretensions. An archway of stone leads to the posting stables, which could well accommodate fifty horses. A part of the stable is vaulted, while the ceiling of the rest is made up of very heavy beams. Over one of the doors is an ancient coat of arms, and in the yard is an old well from which many hundreds of horses have been watered (Plates 56 and 57).



## From Arezzo to Perugia

But for the one modern house Torricella can have altered little [since Pompilia alighted in its tiny street. There is no place along the whole route which can be so vividly associated with her great adventure as this. It only needs the calesse, with the two steaming horses, to be drawn up before the post-house door to make the picture complete. She and her friend must have reached Torricella at about half-past eight in the morning. Here they would have breakfasted. I am sure that, while the horses were being put in, Pompilia would walk down to the water's edge to see the boats, would chat shyly with the fisher-folk, and would pause for long before the ancient picture of the Virgin. In one part of the story, as told in "The Ring and the Book," Pompilia, while the horses are being changed, talks with a woman of the village, and nurses her baby for a while. I think this must have taken place at Torricella.

The road now leaves the lake and, mounting up the hill, reaches Monte Colognola, where are a ruined castle and tower, and a tiny town, whence a view of the lake is to be obtained that cannot be surpassed. The next place on the way is Magione, a little white and grey town on a lofty ridge. Here by the roadside is a huge square fortress, which, by reason of its grim walls, its machicolations, its towers and its heavy buttresses is as truculent, as defiant and as villainous-looking a stronghold as this country of wars, murders and rapine can produce (Plate 58). The gentle Pompilia must have shuddered as she passed beneath its shadow.

At Magione the road descends, and, passing through a maze of low green hills, comes at last in sight of Perugia. The view of the capital of Umbria from the

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

highway to the north is one of supreme fascination. On a long ridge against the sky-line there stands the amazing city, a dim fabric of yellow-grey stone on a blue-grey hill, a fabric so insubstantial, so delicate, so elaborate in the fashioning of its crest of tiny bell-towers, spires and battlements, that—from afar off—it looks like a piece of silversmith's handiwork (Plate 60).



74.—TREVI, FROM THE HIGH ROAD.



### 3. FROM PERUGIA TO FOLIGNO BY ASSISI

CAPONSACCHI and his charge must have arrived at Perugia about noon. The journey of thirteen miles from Torricella would have carried them through a country of great charm, while the reaching of Perugia would mark the first important stage in their flight. They were now forty-six miles from Arezzo, and a little more than twice that distance from Rome. They would probably not drive through the city, but would skirt it on its southern side, for Perugia stands nearly one thousand feet above the Tiber valley, and the climb up to its terrific walls is very steep. One may suppose that Caponsacchi would talk a great deal about this famous town, that Pompilia would revive in the sunshine, and that the wonders around her would help her to forget that dreadful house in Arezzo, and the frowning figure of Guido biting his beard.

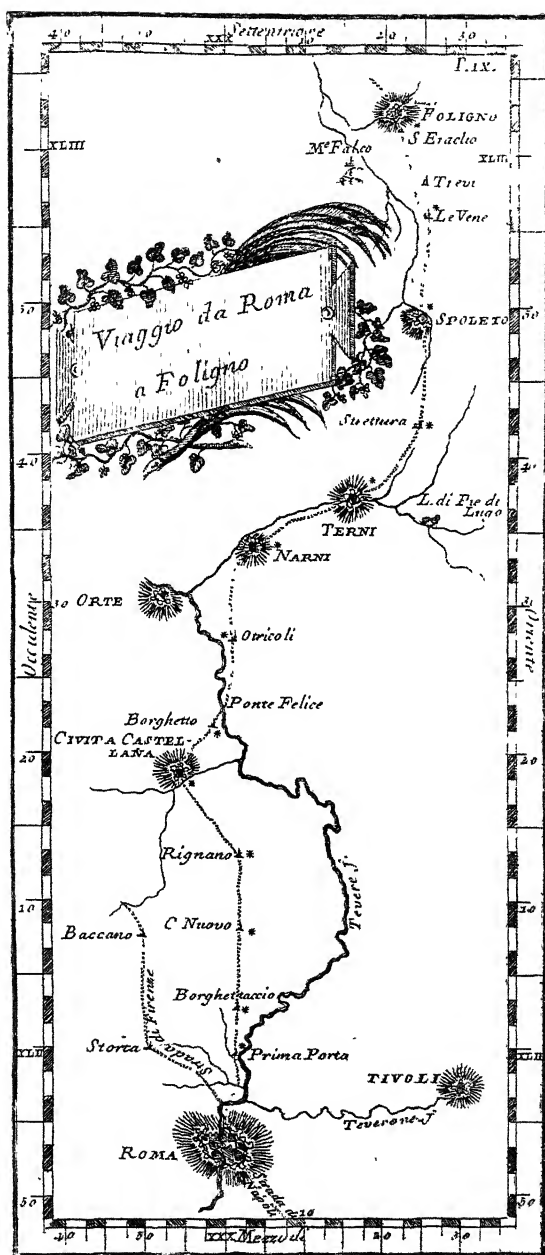
The very ancient city of Perugia is one of the most fascinating in Italy. It has altered so little that it is still a mediæval town. The houses, all of great height, are huddled together along the summit and slopes of the ridge in a confused and unsteady mass, like a crowd of drunken men drowsily shouldering one another. The streets are narrow, tortuous, dark and bewildering. A lane paved with steep steps will leave the sunshine on the hilltop, and will plunge down into the gloom of night among this thicket of old houses. It will shrink to

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

a mere fissure between two towering walls ; it will tunnel a cavernous passage beneath a mass of dwellings ; it will essay to mount the hill again, will emerge for a moment in the light, and will then once more slink down the slope into darkness. To look up at the sky is like looking up from the bottom of a well. One is possessed by the idea that it is the back of every house that is turned to the lane and yet the front is undiscoverable. The houses blend into a disordered fabric of brick and stone, so that it is hard to tell where one begins or the other ends. The doors, for the most part, are as heavy as the portals of a prison. Many entries are very secretive, being approached slyly by unexpected steps and a sinister archway (Plate 62). The whole warren of houses is suspicious, wily, oppressive and fear-compelling.

The past history of Perugia is hideous and revolting. Its annals are concerned with endless fighting, with deadly feuds, with sickening acts of revenge, with base treachery, murder and rapine. At one period there was scarcely a day when the clash of steel was not to be heard in the open square, scarcely a night the awed silence of which was not broken by the shriek of a man stabbed to the heart, or by some sudden and horrible alarm. He who mounted the steep, paved alley by the light of the dawn was likely to come upon a trickle of blood and, following it round a corner or two, stumble over the body of a friend lying head downwards on the slope. Children playing about the purlieus of a palace might be startled to see a faint hand stretched out between the bars of a dungeon window.

And yet, in the midst of all this, Perugino painted



75.—POSTING-ROAD MAP FROM FOLIGNO  
TO ROME BY CASTELNUOVO.

From 'La Vera Guida per chi Viaggia in Italia,' Rome, 1737.





## From Perugia to Foligno by Assisi

his Madonnas and his saints, while young Raphael, palette in hand, dreamed in his master's studio. In the chief piazza of the town stands that most exquisite achievement of art, the fountain of Niccolo Pisano (Plate 61). The little figures that decorate its panels of stone he fashioned in the year 1280—over six centuries ago—when Edward I. was King of England. It was around this fountain that most of the fighting took place, and one wonders how many stricken men have bathed their wounds in its clear pool, and how often a cup of water has been dipped from its basin to allay the thirst of a dying man.

One thing in Perugia can never be forgotten, the twittering of the thousands of swallows that dart in the air, above the streets, around the towers and through the purple deep beyond the walls; a keen, whistling sound it is, as of an articulate wind, very wonderful to hear. So loud is the noise that one can understand how it was that at Savurniano, St. Francis of Assisi told the swallows to cease their twittering, in order that the people might better hear him as he preached.

The ridge on which Perugia stands ends abruptly towards the south, while from the point extends one of the most glorious views to be seen from any height in Umbria. Two plains of immense expanse diverge from the foot of the hill, the one that sweeps away to the right is the Tiber valley, the one to the left is the great Umbrian plain, on the fringe of which are Assisi, Spello and Foligno, the same being all clearly visible from the terrace of the city. Assisi, on the slope of Mount Subasio, looks like a brown mat on a green bank; Spello appears as a talus of stones at the hill-

## From Perugia to Foligno by Assisi

level stretch of land between a world of hills, a plain which ends in a cul-de-sac at Spoleto, thirty-three miles to the southwards. The width of this great flat varies, being about seven miles across if measured from Assisi, and some three and a half miles wide if measured from hill to hill at the foot of Trevi. This plain is very green, since every foot of it is cultivated. It is one vast vineyard from end to end, for it must encompass some two hundred square miles of vines. The vines are supported upon crippled, crutch-like trees, and swing in festoons from branch to branch. Besides the vines are fruit trees of many kinds, olives, and, near the villages and towns, ornamental trees grown for the pure pleasure they give. Between and beneath the vines the land is tilled in formal plots. The crops are of infinite variety—corn, peas, beans, lentils and clover. Viewed from a height, as from the top of Assisi, the plain is made glorious by its immensity, by its gradations of green, by the beauty of the far-off hills. It is at the same time, like the plain about Arezzo, monotonous, while the division of the land into precise plots gives it a little the appearance of a limitless allotment garden. There is one thing that stands up above the level of the plain, one solitary object in the vast stretch of thirty miles of green: it is the mighty dome of the Church of Saint Mary of the Angels, which shelters the little house in which St. Francis lived and the cell in which he died. Caponsacchi and Pompilia would catch sight of it very soon after they had crossed the Tiber, for it stands in the way like a pillar of cloud.

Many travellers coming towards Rome from the north have fallen into ecstasies over the Plain of

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Foligno. I need quote but from one of them. The Earl of Perth was making for Rome early in May in 1695, just two years almost to the week before Pompilia passed along the very road. He says that the plain "lookt like a bason of flowers and greens; one's fancy cannot exceed the beauty of this delightful valley, and no spot of ground can be more rich . . . no description in a romance comes near to the verity here."\* He says that "the hills were covered with mirtles, laurell, bays, lavender, cotton, hysop, pennyroyal, suthernwood," and speaks of the clover, the olives, the apple and cherry trees that he came upon in "this Paradise."

Some few miles beyond the Ponte San Giovanni the road crosses the Chiascio, or Chiaggio, by a picturesque old yellow bridge (Plate 65), and, passing through the wholly uneventful town of Bastia, reaches to the posting-house by Santa Maria degli Angeli, just eleven and a quarter miles beyond Perugia. The two fugitives would draw up at Saint Mary of the Angels about three in the afternoon, and, great as was their haste, it may be assumed that it was at this holy and romantic spot that they tarried the longest. They were at the foot of Assisi and in the very heart of St. Francis's country. Many and many a time had he and his companions walked along the particular road that the two had traversed, talking together and singing and muttering their prayers. It was while journeying by this way from Perugia that St. Francis explained to Brother Leo, whom he always addressed as "thou little sheep of God," what was perfect joy, and how it could be found even if the seeker were struck with a knotty stick and, indeed, beaten "with

\* "Letters of James, Earl of Perth." London, Camden Society, 1845, p. 74.



76.—SPOLETO.



## From Perugia to Foligno by Assisi

all the knots of that stick." Caponsacchi had, without doubt, read the "Fioretti," and possibly knew much of it by heart. He would tell the little countess about Brother Anthony, "that marvellous vessel of the Holy Spirit"; of Brother Juniper, "a man of deep humility," who had unwonted power over demons, and yet who played at see-saw in order to abase himself; of "the seraphic and god-like Brother Giles," who at one time entertained the King of France; and of the saint's special companion, Brother Bernard, who on occasion stood rapt in God, with gaze fast fixed, from morning until nones. Perhaps he would tell of that disciple of St. Francis, named John of the Chapel, "who fell away and finally hanged himself by the neck." Possibly he would point out to her the spot across the plain where stood Bevagna, and where it was that St. Francis preached to "his little sisters the birds," and warned them solemnly to beware of the sin of ingratitude. Certain it is that he would tell her that the country around was once covered with woods, and that in these woods St. Francis and his companions saw visions, spoke with God, and gazed with unblinking eyes upon the radiant face of the Madonna. He would tell how St. Clare came down from the Convent of San Damiano in Assisi to break bread with St. Francis at Saint Mary of the Angels, and how they were so fervent in their discourse that the people who lived on the hillside were amazed to see the house of St. Francis and the wood just hard by the house lit up with a wondrous light as if illumined by the glow of a great fire.

Close to the spot where Pompilia halted with her friend there stands the magnificent Church of St. Mary

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

of the Angels. It will be safe to assume that, while fresh horses were being harnessed to the carriage, the lady and the priest would make their way to the church and would kneel together before the altar to offer up a hurried prayer for the safe ending of their journey. This church, described as "one of the finest churches in the world," is of immense size, being no less than 420 feet in length. It is surmounted by a dome that rises to 258 feet above the pavement, while even the great door is twenty-seven feet in height from floor to architrave. The first stone of the church was laid in 1569, and seventy years passed by before the building was completed. Although it was greatly damaged in the earthquake of 1832, it was restored, and is to-day just such a church as it was when Pompilia passed by on her way to Rome (Plate 66).

It may be wondered why a basilica so immense as to exceed in size many famous cathedrals should have been erected in a trivial hamlet in a vast plain. It was not founded to the glory of Our Lady of the Vineyards, as might be surmised, but was built to provide a shelter for a little stone house, as humble as a hut, and called "the Portiuncula."

The history of the Portiuncula is very simple. When St. Francis, about the year 1208, resolved to forswear a life of luxury and pleasure, and to assume the garb of a monk and the burden of poverty, this little house was a wayside chapel falling into ruin. St. Francis obtained leave to take care of it. He built it up with his own hands. Here he lived; here he founded the great Orders of the Franciscans and the Poor Clares, and here, in a cell near by, he died. The house is

## From Perugia to Foligno by Assisi

said to have been originally erected in the forest by four poor hermits. St. Francis called it "the Portiuncula," or "Little Portion," as being the little portion of the world that God had assigned to him.

The Portiuncula stands now in the centre of the nave, under the glorious cupola. It is a little brown building, some twenty feet long by thirteen feet wide, as plain as a stable. It is the extreme simplicity of the house when compared to the magnificence of the basilica built over it that makes it one of the most impressive religious relics in the world. The two ends of the building are marred by unfitting decoration and frescoes. At each end is a rounded doorway, added since the time of St. Francis, for the convenience of pilgrims.

The sides of the little house are left untouched, are almost pitifully plain, and yet the artlessness of these walls possesses a grandeur to which the immense fabric round about them can make little pretence. On one side of the chapel is the original door, small and crude, through which St. Francis and his companions and the devoted St. Clare must often have passed. In the wall, too, is a tiny lancet window of sublime humility which once lit the little sanctuary. Within the house is the altar upon which were laid the tresses of bright hair cut by St. Francis from the pretty head of Clara Scifi on that Palm Sunday when she knelt in the Portiuncula and renounced the world. Near the shrine is the cell where St. Francis died, where he dictated his last wishes, and where he begged Brother Leo and Brother Angelo to sing to him, as he passed away, the Canticle of the Sun.



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Just outside the church is the rose garden that St. Francis planted, where still grow the famous pink roses that have no thorns. The bushes would be in full bud when Pompilia came to St. Mary of the Angels, for they blossom in May.

High up above the road and opposite to the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli is Assisi, where lie the bodies of St. Francis and St. Clare. The town is grandly placed on the steep end of a ridge at the foot of Monte Subasio. On a mound at the very summit of the town is the old fortress. To the left are Santa Croce and the immense Franciscan monastery. To the right are the Chiesa Nuova, built on the site of the house where St. Francis was born, the Cathedral of San Rufino and Santa Chiara, the mother house of the Poor Clares; while some way down the hillside is the unassuming Convent of San Damiano, where St. Clare spent her life and where she died (Plates 67 and 68).

One object of especial interest in the hamlet of Santa Maria degli Angeli is the old posting-house of the place. It stands on a fragment of the ancient highway, for at this point the road has been diverted from its original course. The post-house can have altered little since the calesse, with the couple from Arezzo, halted there in the spring of 1697. It is a very old house, sadly decayed, possessed of an outside stair and of two storeys besides the ground floor. Attached to it are the vast posting-stables. They are solidly built, are vaulted like the crypt of a church and are capable of standing a hundred horses. So substantially fashioned is this part of the inn that it remained unmoved in the great earthquake of 1832,



77.—THE ROAD BETWEEN SPOLETO AND STRETTURA.



## From Perugia to Foligno by Assisi

and was the place where the people of the village took refuge at the time of that disaster. On one of the pillars of the stable is an ancient fresco said to represent St. Anthony. In a walled garden, just outside the building, stands a picturesque well of great age with an arrangement for the supplying of water to the stables within. This posting-house is as interesting as the one at Torricella, for, like that silent world-forgotten hostelry, it presents an untouched picture of the road and of the houses by the wayside at the time of the story (Plate 69).

From this post-inn to the next halting place at Foligno is a distance of  $9\frac{3}{8}$  miles. The road continues the same. To the left are the everlasting hills and the wan olive trees; to the right are the never-ending vines, the young corn, the bean fields and the poppies. When Goethe made his journey to Rome something went amiss with the carriage when he reached this part of the way, so he started ahead on foot and walked from Assisi to Foligno. It was a walk that deeply impressed him, for he says it was "one of the most beautiful I ever took." Possibly what charmed him most was a curious town he would have passed on the way. This is the bold little town of Spello, which occupies a dome-shaped hill at the foot of the mountains, and looks, from afar off, like a rounded heap of grey stones (Plates 70 and 71).

Although Spello has but few inhabitants it has all the assurance of the capital of a State. It is gallantly fortified, being girt about by a strong wall, on which are many towers ready to be manned by an army of warriors. This self-confident wall is perfectly at

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

ease, whether balanced on the edge of a precipice or clinging to the side of a headlong slope. There is a city gate of much dignity, fitting for the passage of a haughty cavalcade, a city tower for the warder and a perilous look-out of stone for the watchman. Above the entry into Spello are three statues of illustrious personages, to whom the city is pleased to do honour. At the top of a street as steep as a roof is a noble cathedral, four centuries old, wherein are choice paintings, carvings and frescoes, such as are appropriate to any duly famous basilica. Besides this great edifice there is the Church of St. Andrea, where is an altarpiece painted by Pinturicchio. No doubt Spello has its prefect and its council, its council chamber and its court of justice, from which it thunders forth the mandates of the law; anyhow, it has its city palace, adorned with Roman inscriptions and other insignia of extreme age. And yet, with all this, it is scarcely more than a village.

It is, indeed, a little cockerel of a town, crowing on the top of its stone heap; a toy town such as a monarch would give to a petted princelet for a plaything; a miniature city of Troy deporting itself with unsurpassable assurance—and yet, above all, a rare and lovable little place. There is nothing about Spello that is modern. It is a fragment of the Middle Ages, an unspoiled model of the town that was. It is a dream-compelling place, full of charm and picturesqueness to the remotest nook of its hazardous byways.

The Via Flaminia does not pass through the town; for, indeed, the climbing of the hill and the descent of the same would daunt the heart of the bravest post-



78.—THE OLD BRIDGE CROSSED BETWEEN SPOLETO AND STRETTURA.



## From Perugia to Foligno by Assisi

horse. But it passes close beneath the city wall and in front of the city gate; so that Pompilia, as she rode by, could hardly have failed to peep through the archway and to have wondered into what kind of curious town the cobbled street was leading, for to look through the gate of Spello is to look through a door leading into the past.

A few miles beyond Spello, by the same level road and through the same vast vineyards, the town of Foligno is reached. It is a large place possessed, as the guide books say, of "various industries and an episcopal residence." As the hills have at this spot retired a little to the east, Foligno is left alone and unsheltered in the vast flat plain.

Pompilia and Caponsacchi would reach Foligno about six in the evening. Those who wished them ill declared that they spent the night in the town; but not one item of evidence was ever forthcoming to support this statement. Moreover, the speed at which they were travelling, as shown by the hour when Castelnuovo was reached, would render any but the briefest halt at any place on the journey quite impossible. Foligno is a walled city, and on its northern side a stream runs outside the town, at the foot of the wall. There is, therefore, a bridge to cross and a gate to enter for all who would pass into the town. The bridge and the gate both stand, but it is evident they have been much restored since Pompilia passed into Foligno by this road from Assisi (Plate 72). The gate, even if not very ancient, is still solemnly closed at ten of the night. As the two made their way through the town to the southern entry they would cross the market square and pass the beautiful



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Cathedral of San Feliziano, the exquisite façade of which dates from the year 1201. Pompilia would notice by the sides of the central door two crouching lions, very like the two that wait outside her own particular Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome (Plate 73). Of the post-house at which they changed horses I can find no trace. It probably stood on the site of the present Albergo della Posta, which is without doubt the most excellent hotel between Perugia and Rome.

Those who are familiar with Raphael's "Madonna of Foligno" in the Vatican, famous for its fine figure of St. Francis of Assisi, will find the Foligno of to-day in no way like the fantastic town which forms the background of this gracious painting. Foligno of the present day is a clean, bustling, pleasant town, picturesque and full of interest. It contains several palaces and numerous ancient houses of infinite charm. There is, moreover, that most venerable and archaic Church of Santa Maria infra Portas, with its eighth century porch, its frescoes by Niccolo da Foligno, who died in 1502, and its still more ancient Byzantine wall paintings. As the two runaways crossed the piazza the driver, if as loquacious then as are drivers now, may have pointed out the Palazzo del Governo, which was held by the Trinci as far back as 1398, and have told them that the little chapel on the upper floor contained frescoes by Ottaviano Nelli, painted in 1424, to illustrate the history of the Virgin.

#### 4. THE JOURNEY ACROSS THE HILLS AND BEYOND TO CASTELNUOVO

AFTER leaving Foligno the two in the calesse would enter upon the most weary and most difficult part of their enterprise—the journey by night across the hills to the uplands which overlook the Campagna of Rome. The great Umbrian plain which Pompilia and her companion were traversing ends at Spoleto, where it is shut in by a rampart of hills drawn defiantly across the road. From Foligno to Spoleto is a distance of seventeen miles, the highway is level and the aspect of the country the same as that of the rest of the long valley. Between the two towns is the posting-station of Le Vene.

Some five or six miles from Foligno is the astonishing town of Trevi—a cairn-like landmark in the southern end of the plain (Plate 74). It stands some way to the left of the road, a steep, conical mound, shaped like a pierrot's hat, and covered with houses from top to bottom. Life on this hill of Sisyphus must be hard, for the citizens of Trevi are always either climbing up or sidling down. They might as well be living on a stone stairway, and one may suppose that they would experience actual confusion whenever they found themselves on a level road. It is quite appropriate that the chief church in Trevi should be sacred to Our Lady of Tears. The mount, however, is picturesque, as would

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be any pyramid-shaped town, where the front door of each house is on the level of some neighbour's roof.

A few miles beyond Trevi is the trifling hamlet of Le Vene, where was an old posting-station. At this point there is, by the roadside, a beautiful pool of water, shaded by trees and surrounded by an informal garden, very delightful to look upon. Here is the source of the Clitumnus, made famous by Pliny and feebly sung about by Byron.

Before Spoleto is reached the road passes through the peculiar town of San Giacomo—peculiar in the determined character of its defences and its effort to take care of itself. San Giacomo would appear to have been a city of the plain which was liable to be raided any day in the year and to be roused hideously any night by fearful alarms. Some part of the town is lodged within a species of brigand-proof safe, in the form of a square castle, the inside of which is packed with crowded dwellings and the very narrowest of streets.

Spoleto, as seen from the plain, especially about the time of the setting of the sun, affords a gorgeous presentation of a town. The hills end in a sudden line, like a breaking comber on a beach. On the crest and slopes of the foremost height is reared Spoleto (Plates 76 and 79). The town forms a great bastion barring the way. It stands erect, a pile of vast houses, of massive walls, of steeples and towers, with, on the summit, an ancient and imperious fortress known as La Rocca. The straight white road, issuing from among its vineyards, is swallowed up by the city, while beyond there would appear to be no



79.—A STREET IN SPOLETO.



80.—THE CASTLE ABOVE STRETTURA



## The Journey Across the Hills to Castelnovo

way out through the intricate barrier of the mountains. Of the charm of Spoleto it is needless to speak. The traveller knows well its palaces, its gates, its churches, its mysterious streets, its wily alleys and the supreme view from the city wall, which embraces the whole of the plain as far away as Perugia.

It would be nearly midnight when Pompilia arrived at Spoleto. If she paused to think, she would find it hard to believe that only twenty-four hours had passed since she was dressing herself in the dark in her hated room at Arezzo, was collecting her few treasures, tying up her money in a handkerchief, and about to venture, breathless with terror, upon the perilous descent of the creaking stair that led to the palace door.

Now would commence, at the blackest depth of the night, the journey across the hills to Terni, a distance of sixteen miles, with scarcely a habitation to be met with the whole way through, except at the little posting-village of Strettura. The road, which is most fascinating in the daylight, may well be almost terrifying in the dark. No part of the route from Arezzo to Rome is more beautiful than this long mountain pass, unless it be the road that skirts the Lake of Trasimene.

The highway for miles mounts up and up, winding from valley to valley, between hills so closely set that, here and there, it seems as if the sky would be shut out. The mountain slopes are at first covered with olives, then, as the greater heights are reached, there appear forests of ilex and of pine, with savage undergrowth and rugged boulders. The way may pass through a rocky defile or a sullen ravine, or dip into a gentle glade and then struggle to a hilltop, whence

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is a view of a valley just traversed, with the road as a broken thread of white in the gaps among the green (Plate 77).

On nearing Strettura the carriage would cross a very venerable bridge with a single arch (Plate 78). It is humble enough and narrow enough, but it is ennobled by a stately coat of arms, carved in stone, as well as by a tedious inscription in Latin, made interesting by the date with which the verbiage ends—the year 1577. In many places, especially in the country of the bridge, the road is steep—is, indeed, so dangerously steep that progress by night must have been very slow.

Strettura would be reached about two in the morning—the morning of another day. This solitary village is  $8\frac{3}{4}$  miles from Spoleto. On the hill to the left of it is a fine castle, more or less in ruins, and surrounded by a wall of such solidity and resolution that the centuries have left it almost untouched (Plate 80). Strettura consists of a single, indefinite street, a number of most picturesque old houses and a grandmotherly old church. As a village it is very pretty, very dirty and as completely cut off from the world as the most bitter misanthropist could wish. The posting-house is a delightful and ancient building, with a romantic roofed gallery thrown across the road, like a kind of rustic triumphal arch. Possibly, in old days, this wooden gallery was a favourite resort for persons of leisure, in the cool of the evening, when they could lean over the rail and watch the carriages and pack-horses arrive or depart (Plate 81).

I think it would be at Strettura, at two o'clock in the morning, in this dark maze among the hills and after twenty-four hours of incessant haste, that Pompilia's

## The Journey Across the Hills to Castelnovo

courage would be nearest to failing her and that she would half repent of the step she had taken.

In a while the road begins definitely to descend. Olive groves appear again on the slopes on either side of the pass, the mountains open and the great Flaminian Way glides down to the level plain of Terni. This flat is of quite small extent, so that the hills very soon come in the path again. Terni is at the present time a manufacturing town of over 25,000 inhabitants. It is probably of no more interest now than it was when Pompilia passed by, although the old city wall and the gate towers have some little charm about them. The couple would reach Terni at 4.30 in the morning, and as they crossed the narrow plain would see the dawn break over the circle of hills with which they would now be surrounded.

It is  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles on to Narni, through a green country, cultivated and tended like a precious garden. At Narni the hills begin once more. The fugitives would reach the town at seven in the morning, with little thought that by the same hour on the following day they would find themselves lodged in jail, and would hear Count Guido Franceschini stamping and swearing in the courtyard outside their prison.

Narni is superbly situated on the brim of a precipitous ravine, at the foot of which the Nera forces its way through the rocks to join the Tiber (Plate 82). The sides of this terrific gorge are lined with evergreen trees, mostly ilex, and with a dense bush. Narni clings, like a martin's nest, to the brink of the cliff, and so far below is the river that the sound of its waters is almost drowned by the whistling of the swallows that dart and double



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over the great chasm. It is a pretty, rambling town, with all its lanes in a confusing tangle, and a savage castle dominant on its summit. It has a little piazza, with a fountain in its centre, and a church and various ancient buildings standing around it in sleepy admiration. Possibly Pompilia and her friend saw little of this walled city, for they would assuredly breakfast at Narni while the horses were being changed (Plate 83).

The next stopping place is Otricoli,  $8\frac{3}{4}$  miles away, a short stage, but an arduous one, as the track is across the hills. It is a beautiful road, never level for long, commanding wide views on all sides, and plunging the while through a country of olives and vines, of growing corn and blossoming acacias and of hedge-rows more brilliant with flowers possibly than any yet encountered on the way.

Otricoli is an old walled town, situated on a height, from which extends an amazing prospect across the Tiber valley to the hills on the other side, where lies hidden the town of Civita Castellana. From the diaries of travellers of bygone days, it would appear that Otricoli was a favourite stopping place, a place at which to take dinner or to spend the night. This can be no matter of wonder, for the exquisite little town belongs wholly to the past, is curious and simple, while the look-out from its walls is one not easily to be forgotten. The view shown in Plate 84 is taken from the old posting-house of Otricoli, a crumbling, unsteady building on arches, on the wall of which is still to be seen a notice dealing with posting charges to Narni.

Pompilia would reach Otricoli at 9.30 in the morning,



81.—THE POSTING-HOUSE AT STRETTURA.



## The Journey Across the Hills to Castelnuovo

and, as the posting-inn is quite close to the edge of the hill, it may be assumed that she walked to the walls to rest her eyes upon the placid valley through which the Tiber was lazily sweeping on its way to Rome.

From Otricoli the road descends to the level bank of the river, and here, some five or six miles beyond Otricoli, the carriage would cross the Tiber for the second time. The bridge which spans the river at this spot is the famous Ponte Felice, the "Happy Bridge." This bridge is as old<sup>1</sup> as the Via Flaminia, but, in its present form, dates only from 1589, when it was reconstructed by Sixtus V. It is a handsome bridge, more fitted, perhaps, for such a city as Rome than for an almost uninhabited valley. It is of yellow brick and time-worn stone, is somewhat ambitiously ornamented, while in every cranny between the blocks of its masonry some green weed or bush is growing (Plate 85).

Just beyond the Happy Bridge are the great tower and castle of Borghetto, now in ruins, but still strong enough, it may be, to command the road across the river, which it has defended for so many centuries (Plate 86). The guide books say little of this hoary stronghold and nothing of the fights it has witnessed, nor of the people who have died in its dungeons, nor of the hordes of wild men who have rushed, in times of alarm, from its sally-ports, yelling the battle-cry of Borghetto as they poured down the slope to the bridge.

Possibly Pompilia, when she had reached as far as this, was too weary to ask Caponsacchi to tell her about the castle. She would only comfort herself with the sleepy thought that they had crossed the

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Happy Bridge and were within thirty-three miles of Rome.

The road, leaving the Tiber valley, now mounts up the hill to Civita Castellana, the last town of any size before Rome. The two runaways would arrive at this ancient Etruscan city at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Civita Castellana is situated on an isolated plateau, with a huge ravine on either side (Plate 87). This chasm that cuts Civita Castellana off from the rest of Italy is very deep, very astonishing and supremely beautiful. It is a sudden gash in the earth, as clean cut as the slash of a hatchet. The brown-red cliffs that form the walls of this terrific moat are perpendicular, harsh and forbidding. The chasm itself, on the other hand, is filled with trees and bushes of the softest and daintiest green, while above the tree tops floats a faint, blue mist haunted by swallows. The ravine is most fascinating to see in the early spring, about the time when Pompilia came this way; while in the winter, as the day is waning, it is a black pit horrible to look down into. To the south of the city the ravine sinks away into a gentle valley, carrying along with it the stream that encircles the plateau (Plate 89). If the traveller, when some distance on the road to Rome, looks back by the way he has come, Civita Castellana appears as a mass of brown rock rising out of a green lagoon.

The town itself is a queer, obsolete place, once wealthy and powerful, now poor, distraught and purposeless; a city that the world has long forgotten (Plate 88). Its haughty palaces are now little more than superb sepulchres for filth and for frowsy humanity; fowls

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march out into the street from beneath the arches of elegantly carved doorways; a kerosene tin with a red geranium in bloom occupies a balcony of the most precious ironwork; whilst the outside stairs of stone, the mysterious entries, the pillared *logge*, seem to belong to the properties of some mediæval stage play.

Civita Castellana has all the necessary elements of a romantic Italian town—the untidy piazza with its dripping fountain, the cathedral, still magnificent in spite of its 700 years, the blind, fumbling lanes, the women knitting in the shadows, and the heavy, insidious, evil-suggesting smell.

From the south end of the town is a pleasant view of Monte Soracte, which stands on the way between Civita Castellana and Rome. This isolated hill, over 2,000 feet high, is very beautiful to contemplate at a distance, when it looks like a purple cone rising out of the plain; but near at hand it is an exceedingly harsh ridge of precipitous limestone, grey as a heap of ashes and pitifully bare. On the summit of the height are the little Church of San Silvestro and the ruins of a shrivelled monastery. It would be a joy to Pompilia to catch sight of Soracte again, for it is a mountain that can be seen from the high lands about Rome (Plates 90 and 91).

From Civita Castellana to Castelnuovo is a distance of  $13\frac{1}{4}$  miles, with one posting-station on the way at a small town called Rignano. Rignano is a straggling place, lying in a hollow surrounded by olive trees. The road merely skirts one end of the settlement, and that the least ancient part of it (Plate 92).

In this portion of the Via Flaminia some remains

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of the old Roman highway are come upon, in the form of large slabs of blue-grey stone, almost hidden in the grass and flowers by the wayside. At one spot the modern road turns a little aside from the ancient track, and there, much overgrown, is seen the undisturbed road of the Consul Flaminius—a hard, narrow, paved road, heading direct for Rome. This fragment enables one to appreciate the observation of M. de Brosse when he wrote of the Flaminian Way as "one of the hardest antiquities that I am acquainted with."

The road between Civita Castellana and Castelnuovo is uninteresting and monotonous, the country bare and wild, and to a large extent treeless. On nearing Castelnuovo it becomes a track across naked, inhospitable downs, a road so long, so wearisome, so unfriendly that it must have preyed upon Pompilia's spirits, must have intensified her fatigue to sheer misery, and her yearning to rest and be still to an overwhelming possession. She determined, in spite of Caponsacchi's entreaties, to spend the night at Castelnuovo at any cost, to lie down and sleep at any risk, although she was almost within sight of Rome and within reach of safety. The last few miles of the road had made the journey hideous; the grinding of the wheels on the stones had ground into her brain, and the everlasting sound of the horses' feet had maddened her beyond all peace.

Castelnuovo is so situated that on coming in from the north nothing is to be seen of the town (which lies some way to the left of the road) until the carriage actually draws up at the door of the tragic inn, which stands almost alone on the highway.



82.—NARNI.





## 5. CASTELNUOVO

CASTELNUOVO, as already stated, lies some little way to the left, or east, of the high road to Rome. Indeed, the little town is separated from that road by a deep valley filled with olive trees. The highway at this part of its course runs along the edge of a lofty plateau, which forms the western slope of the valley. From this plateau a narrow ridge runs out into the Campagna and, curving to the south, finds itself almost parallel with the road. Along the top of the ridge is the narrow by-way to Castelnuovo; while at the extremity of the ridge, where it becomes suddenly precipitous, stands the small town, a pile of houses, roof above roof. It is easy, when making for Rome, to pass Castelnuovo without seeing it, especially if the hedge by the side of the track is in leaf. But if the traveller will stand on the Via Flaminia, just where is the stone which marks twenty-six kilometres from Rome, and if he will find a gap in the bushes, he will see, immediately below him, a green valley, and across the valley, on the bluff end of a long hill, the town he seeks.

The position of Castelnuovo is most commanding, for at its foot lies one of the northern reaches of the Campagna, while from its walls extends, like the flight of a bird, an unbroken view across the valley of

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the Tiber and away seawards to the dim Alban Hills, which rise to the south of Rome. The town, indeed, is on a headland thrust out into the misty plain of the Campagna.

As to what it looks like from the main road, no better words can be used than those of de Brosses, when speaking of Livorno: "Imagine a little pocket town, pretty enough to put into one's snuffbox"—such is Castelnuovo. It is a town that a toy-maker would fashion, a hill town in miniature, a feature for a garden, an exquisite small fabric of grey walls and yellow-green roofs on a mound of olives. At the very summit of the town is a huge square building. That is the Pretura, where Caponsacchi and Pompilia were confined after their arrest at the inn. To the left of it is the church, with its old campanile. Around these two buildings, on the steep sides of the hill, the town clings (Plate 93).

Castelnuovo is a very ancient place, and possesses at this present time some 1,500 inhabitants. The houses, if old, are at least substantial, and there is not a modern building in the place; for since the last post-chaise rumbled along the road Castelnuovo has slept, and the busy world has left its slumbers undisturbed. When I first caught sight of the town from the highway it might have been a city of the dead, for the valley is very quiet, and the impression remained until the silence was broken by the shrill calling of children from among the houses and by the sound of a drowsy bell in the church tower.

Browning had evidently no personal knowledge of

## Castelnuovo

Castelnuovo. His description of the place is singularly inapplicable, for he speaks of

"Castelnuovo's few mean, hut-like homes  
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak."

The editor of the last edition (1912) of "The Ring and the Book" terms this ancient town a "hamlet"; while in the notes to Mr. Charles Hodell's version of the Yellow Book it is spoken of as "a village of but a few houses."

The posting-inn at which Pompilia and the priest alighted is on the main road, and, therefore, some small distance from the actual town. It is an old building, constructed very solidly of stone covered with plaster, and possesses just one storey above the ground floor. That part of the inn which faces the road is built on arches. Within these arches is a cavernous shelter for carts. It was here, no doubt, that the carriage was housed for the night, while Pompilia slept in the upper room. Embedded in the front wall, close by the arch of entry, is an inscribed tablet (shown in Plate 94) dealing with the Via Flaminia, and dated 1580. At one end of the house is an outside chimney of exceptional size. It belongs to the inn kitchen. The place, which is very much larger than would appear from the road, is no longer used as a tavern. On one wall is still to be seen, in very faint letters, the words "Albergo della Posta"; but it must have been a long time since any travellers drew up at the door. The house is now derelict and empty, save for two small rooms on the upper floor, which are occupied by a poor family. The building is slowly falling into decay; but so extremely substantial is it that Time, unaided and alone, will need many years to bring about its dissolution.

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The entry is by way of a small arched portal of stone. This opens directly into the common room of the inn, a large chamber with a paved floor and immense beams in the ceiling. At one side is a spacious fireplace, where, no doubt, a genial wood fire has burned on many a winter's night, when travellers were expected on the road. The heavy mantelpiece of stone is in keeping with the house, which, in spite of its humble exterior, is of no small pretensions within. The ancient room is bare of furniture, and there is nothing to suggest that it has altered in any essential since Pompilia was led in from the carriage and sank exhausted upon the first bench she could reach (Plate 95).

By the side of the fireplace is a much-worn stone stair that no one would dispute has seen little change for the last two hundred years and more. Its balustrade is made of upright blocks of stone connected at the top by an iron rail. After some ten steps a window is reached, and here the stair turns to the right and mounts upwards through a stone passage with a vaulted roof. The passage recalls the narrow stair made in the thickness of the wall of a mediæval castle. This is the only staircase in the house. Up these stone steps Pompilia was helped to her room, or possibly, as the poem says, was carried there in the arms of Caponsacchi. It was up this very stair that Guido rushed to denounce his wife, followed by the stumbling yokels who represented the law.

Now, if at no time before, are we in intimate touch with the story. It is easy to picture this very room in the early hours of that eventful morning. The room is still; the lamp on the mantelpiece has almost flickered out;



83.—A STREET IN NARNI.

## Castelnuovo

over a bench is thrown Pompilia's cloak ; at the foot of the stair stands Caponsacchi listening eagerly for any sound of movement in the room above, while at the same time he watches the faint light of the dawn grow in the window on the stair. He starts at a sound that comes in through the open door, the sound of footsteps in the road. He rushes out through the archway and meets Count Guido face to face.

From the common room of the inn a passage leads to the old dining-room, which possesses a cove ceiling very crudely painted. Near by is the kitchen, which is so archaic as to remind one of the kitchens in Pompeii, for the stove is of stone. The kitchen, although small, is evidently capable of providing for many, while the baking oven is of untoward size. There are other rooms on the ground floor, one of which has a rounded roof ; all have enormously thick walls ; all are empty ; in one place is a cupboard hollowed out of the very substance of the wall. The windows look over the valley and provide a fascinating view of the little toy town of Castelnuovo.

There are several rooms upstairs, some large, some small. They have brick floors, while the ceilings are traversed by heavy beams. All are empty, except the two already mentioned, and perhaps a third should be included, because it is occupied by a hen and her chickens. The better rooms, small as they are, open on the road, while the chambers at the back look over the valley and the town. It rests with any who wander over this empty house to determine, to their own satisfaction, in which room the little countess slept on that ever-memorable night. There being nothing to

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guide one in the selection, I would venture to choose a certain room, capable of taking two beds, which has a window on the highway.

This old Albergo della Posta stands at the point where the by-way leads off to Castelnuovo. This by-way is a pleasant road, especially in the early morning in the spring. Probably it failed to impress the party of people who walked along it shortly after sunrise on Wednesday, May 1st, 1697. First of all, I think, would walk Pompilia, sobbing gently to herself, her little arm in the grip of a brawny officer of police, while, in her other hand, she would hold the handkerchief, damp with mopping her eyes, in the corner of which she had tied up her money. Then would come Caponsacchi, upright and defiant, still suffused with rage, still maddened with indignation, firmly bound with cords and held a prisoner between two men proud of their importance. He would whisper words of comfort from time to time for the ear of the lady he had done his best to save. Next would pass Guido, biting his beard and with so horrible a smile on his face as to frighten the curious boys who trotted by his side. Last of all would be the deeply concerned servant from the inn, carrying the goods that had been found in the possession of the suspected couple, including Pompilia's "little box with many trifles inside."

On the way they would pass a most engaging little chapel, now old and lamentably decayed. It has a pillared portico, a stolid door and a single window very heavily barred. It has a small belfry too, from which the Angelus might have rung while all these dreadful things were in progress (Plate 96).



## Castelnuovo

Of all little towns between Florence and Rome with which I am acquainted I think that Castelnuovo is the most entrancing. I am aware that its association with the Franceschini story has much to do with its attractiveness; but, apart from this, it is so unspoiled, so entirely a part of Old Italy, so infantile and inconsequent in its planning, so ridiculous, that in comparison with a well-reasoned resort of man it is a mere kitten of a town. It has two piazze, but no streets. It has, indeed, no need of streets, for so steep are the slopes of Castelnuovo that a street would be merely a shoot down which people would slide. It has lanes, but they are as erratic as are the gambols of a kitten pursuing its own tail. The lane will mount some stone stairs sideways for the purpose of descending other stairs at a different angle; it will then turn upon itself and try to get back to where it started from, will be demurely level for a moment and will then fall out of the town, as if it had slipped over a cliff (Plate 97). Through any gap in the circuit of the place will be a view over the Campagna and Tiber valley on the one hand, or across the beautiful country of hills and dales on the other, where the dales are wooded and where the hills are green and are tossed about over the land in exquisite disorder.

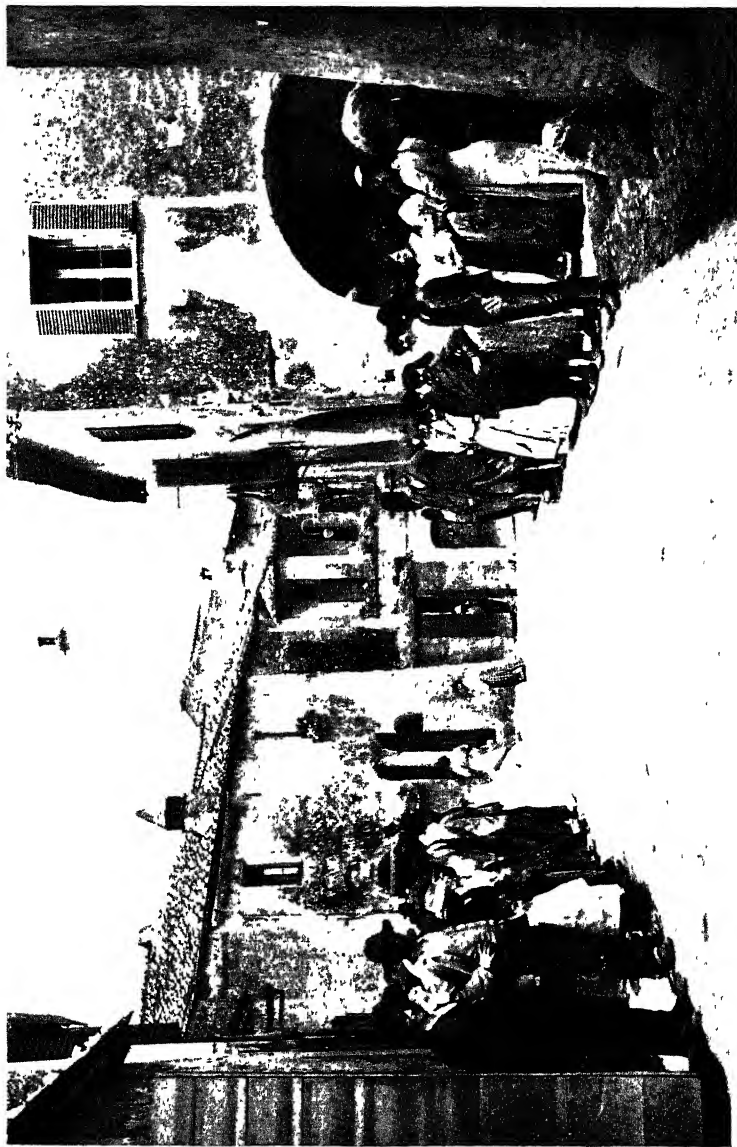
There are more corners in Castelnuovo, I believe, than in any place of its size in the world. No town, large or small, shows more indecision or less conception of what it wants or intends to do. No two houses are alike, and none, except in one piazza, are on the same level. In the other piazza the question of level is dealt with by building one house on the flat and the next on a mound, so that it has to be

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approached by a stair. There is a particular dwelling, designed by a genius in variation, which is reached by a descent towards the bowels of the earth and an entry, it would seem, through the cellar.

In spite of these distractions, which would drive a surveyor to madness, Castelnuovo is bright, cheerful, contented and clean. It is certainly a town and also a maze; but it is in addition a poultry farm. For rambling in the lanes are numerous fluffy chickens with red, green or blue ribbons tied round their necks to show to whom they belong. A crippled person would not live long in Castelnuovo, while the frequenter of taverns, who wandered about at night, would either find himself repeatedly at the place he started from, or would fall off the town into the valley and be lost.

The visitor to Castelnuovo attains very suddenly to the heart of the town. A step or two from the open country, and he stands in the Piazza del Duomo, or Cathedral Square, which is to Castelnuovo what Trafalgar Square is to London. It is into this square that the two prisoners would be led from the inn. The piazza is small, prim and neat. On one side is the church. It has been recently rebuilt and is a poor affair, tawdry and garish; but the campanile of Roman brick is very old and dignified, and might remind Caponsacchi a little of the superb bell tower of his own Church of Santa Maria della Pieve. On another side of the square is a large ancient building, very vague and curious. It has a massive outside stair of stone, beneath which is an archway. It is surmounted by a belfry and a little cross. It must have been a monastic



84.—THE MAIN ROAD THROUGH OTRICOLI, FROM THE OLD POST-HOUSE.



## Castelnuovo

house of some kind, but it is now apparently empty as regards its upper regions. On the ground it accommodates, in very picturesque and casual fashion, the shops of Castelnuovo—the grocer's shop, the charcoal dealer's, the leatherseller's shop, the pork shop and the café (Plate 98).

On a third side of the piazza is an amazing brick wall of such aggressive height and substance that it overwhelms the tiny square. It is a wall some centuries old, the warm, ruddy colour of which is in contrast with the green weeds and tufts of green bush which spring from every cranny. Early in May these strangely placed plants are covered with yellow flowers. The wall is so vast that it might form the base of a Tower of Babel, a conception which is assisted by the fact that on the face of the wall, and cut out of its thickness, is a zigzag stone stair, such as is shown in pictures of the tower in children's books on Bible history.

The stone stair leads to an immense building of hoary brick, situated on the top of the wall. This is the Pretura, a fact made evident by a shield on the wall presenting the arms of Italy and the words: "R. Pretura. Castelnuovo di Porto" (Plate 99). It was here that Pompilia and the priest were imprisoned. At each end of the building, which is three storeys in height, is a species of tower, giving the whole fabric the appearance of a fortress. The windows are square and would seem to have been enlarged and modernised. On a side wall of this ponderous building is a coat of arms in stone, representing three bees. This is the shield of the Barberini, one member

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of which family was Pope between the years 1623 and 1644.

The stone stair leading up to the Pretura is very interesting, because up this identical stair Pompilia must have been conducted on her way to prison, since there is no other means of access to the building. The upper flight of the stair has been renovated, but the lower part (that shown in Plate 100) is in its original condition, being paved with cobble stones so worn that the present steps must have been old even in Pompilia's time.

The door of the Pretura is of some standing, for the wood of it has almost perished. It leads into an open courtyard, deep as a pit, which is assuredly of greater antiquity than the front of the building. In the centre is a well, with an uncouth wooden structure over it for the pulling up of the bucket. The water in the well is evidently not entirely trusted, for at the moment of entering the Pretura, a handsome girl, carrying a copper water urn on her head, crossed the court with stately carriage and passed the well by as anathema.

Some parts of the interior of the Pretura are very ancient, for here stood a castle of the Colonnas, and many remains of that stronghold still exist. The most interesting of these is a tiny chapel, or oratory, in the centre of the building. It is little more than a cell, has a groined roof of stone, a paved floor and one small window. It is now used as a bedroom, and a very minute bedroom it makes. Painted on a wall is a most archaic Madonna and Child—a mere yellow shadow of a picture. Of the great age of the work there

## Castelnuovo

can be no doubt. The warder of the Pretura stated that it was executed by Barna, a painter, I find, who died in 1381. The little oratory itself would appear to be of an earlier date than this, but of the history of the castle I can find no account.

From the open courtyard where the well stands, a stone stair leads up to a public hall, large, dim and empty. Into this hall Pompilia and Caponsacchi would be brought, and here they would wait the pleasure of the representative of the law. This common hall is of little interest, but leading out of it by a few steps is the Sala della Adienze, or Audience Chamber, which is as perfect and as beautiful a specimen of the ancient justice room as will be found anywhere. The room is small and square and lit by two windows. It has a wonderful cove roof, ornamented and cunningly divided into panels by delicate plaster work. In each panel is a picture, for the whole ceiling is painted. The paintings are stated to be the work of Zuccherro, who lived between the years 1529 and 1569. The subjects are very varied. There are in four panels the four Seasons. Other pictures represent the Rape of the Sabines, the parade of armed galleys before a naval battle, Emperors in council, and the Sibyl offering the mystic books to Tarquin. The colours are, from the lapse of years, becoming faint, and have, in some places, disappeared, leaving a mere phantom of the artist's design. The general effect, however, of the display of faded pinks and blues and yellows is extremely beautiful.

In the room is a large table covered with green cloth. Behind it is the magistrate's bench, constructed of wood which has been coloured black. On either side of the

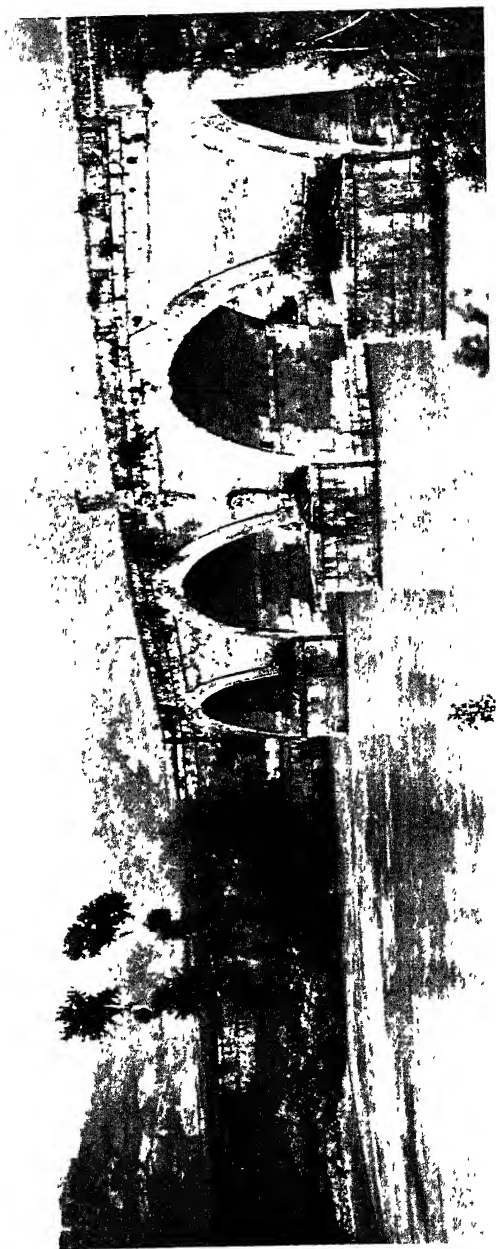
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

table, and standing with its back against the wall, is a humbler bench for those who have business in the court. On one of these benches, or on one like them—for they are not very old—I think Guido must have sat and scowled at the two prisoners at the bar, his chin resting on his hand, his elbow on his knee.

Now, in front of the table, and therefore in front of the justice's bench, is a wooden railing, the wood of which is black from age. It extends almost across the room, from the door to window. It is the bar at which the prisoners stood. The warder of the prison, who is at the same time the general factotum of the Pretura, drew special attention to this wooden rail and to the obvious antiquity of it. It must have stood here when Pompilia and her companion were brought before the magistrate to answer the charge laid against them by Count Guido. On this very bar—it is hardly too much to assume—Pompilia's actual hands have rested. As she turned towards the bench her profile would stand out against the sunny window as does the face of a saint painted, in the old fashion, upon a background of gold.

At the foot of the stair that leads from the well court to the public hall is a heavy door. This is the door of the prison to which the little countess and the priest were dragged after the business in the justice's room had been disposed of. There is nothing to lead one to think that these prisons have undergone any change since 1697. The cells are small, and have all the aspect of sober age. The warder spoke of them as if they had existed from all time. There are cells for male prisoners on one side and for female culprits on





85.—THE PONTE FELICE ACROSS THE TIBER.



## Castelnuovo

the other. At the time of my visit there were six prisoners in this small jail; so, although the town is so simple and childlike, and although in the country round about every prospect pleases, yet there are still evil-doers in Castelnuovo, even if they have not arrived there in a calesse from Arezzo, smothered with dust, and speechless from fatigue.

There is more to be seen of Pompilia's prison from another part of the town. At the back of the Pretura is a trivial square called the Piazza Garibaldi (Plate 101). It is a very meagre piazza, with an unmistakable suggestion of squalor about it. It is occupied by a few old cottages, disposed in the agreeable disorder which is characteristic of Castelnuovo. One side of the square is taken up from end to end by the great building. It looks even more formidable from this piazza than it does from the front; for it presents itself as an untidy precipice, made up of the exposed rock of the hill, surmounted by a wall of rough stone or of brick, which same is made ragged by tufts of weed and shaggy brambles, all clinging in determined fashion to the inhospitable height.

Far up on the face of this high wall are five square windows, heavily barred. These are the windows of the prison (Plate 102). By the light of one of these Pompilia wrote her letter to the old people in the Via Vittoria. The midday sun would throw a shadow of the bars upon the floor of the cell, for the prison faces south. Saddest of all is this, that from her window, Pompilia would see stretched before her eyes the valley of the Tiber, the peaceful Campagna, and the fair country that lies about the city of Rome. After long days of turmoil

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and unhappiness, after the nightmare journey from Arezzo, after the desperate attempt to save a life other than her own, these sullen iron bars came between her and the goal that was already in sight and shut her out from the paradise, the threshold of which she had almost reached.

## 6. FROM CASTELNUOVO TO ROME

FROM Castelnuovo to the walls of Rome is a distance of  $15\frac{1}{2}$  miles. It is a very pleasant and picturesque road, although one may be assured that Pompilia and Caponsacchi took little note of it, as they made this—the last—stage in their eventful journey to Rome. For the first few miles the road passes through a wooded district where are many oaks, hawthorns, clumps of white and pink wild roses, masses of yellow broom, and here and there a patch of bracken.

About  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Castelnuovo are the few houses which mark Borghettaccio, or Mal Borghetto as the old maps give it. Here was a post-station, one of the two between Castelnuovo and Rome.

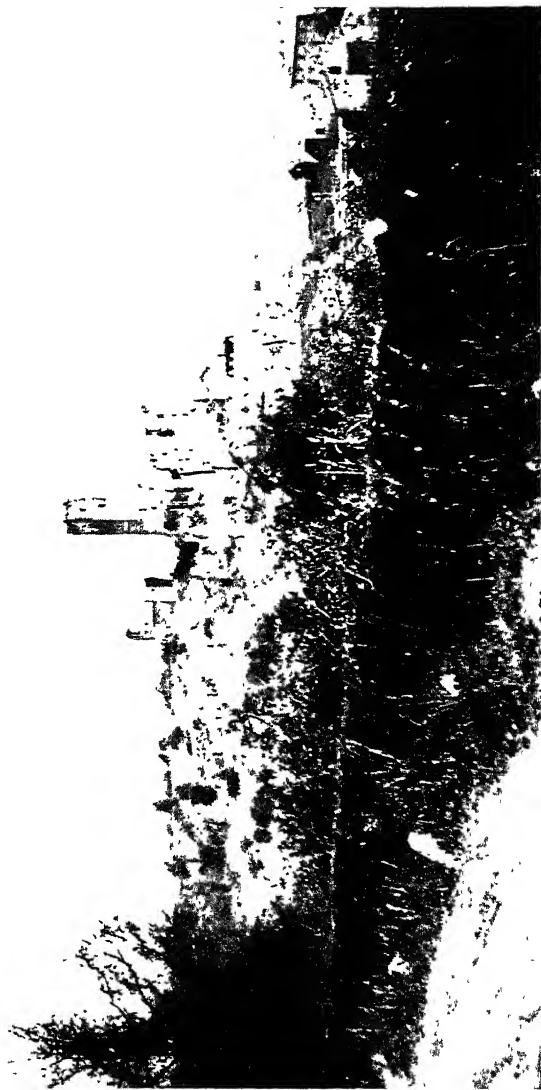
Borghettaccio stands at an altitude of some 315 feet, and provides a singularly fascinating view of the Campagna, with, in the far distance, Monte Mario and the domes and towers of the great city. It would be from this point, while the horses halted, that Pompilia and her fellow prisoner would have their first sight of Rome. It must have been to them a memorable moment. From no spot to the north of Rome does the Campagna look more beautiful, in the month of May, than from the high ground about Borghettaccio (Plate 103). By the side of the road is a stone wall rising out of a border of acanthus, whose great leaves are in May at their very greenest. Beyond the wall the land drops down to a

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

vast undulating grass country, wherein are slopes dotted with trees, glens filled with undergrowth, level meads and tiny valleys, with here and there a steep grey cliff and here and there the green track of a hidden rivulet. Far away is a hillock so covered with yellow broom that it looks like a golden ball. Nearer at hand are glades so bright with small white flowers that they seem to be sprinkled with hoar frost; while, in another valley, full of blue shadow, there may be a film of amber which looks like the golden weed in a trough of the Sargasso Sea. On one smooth height wanders a flock of sheep, or a company of black goats maybe, making their way down a winding path, while, alone, as the only human creature in sight, stands a man in a cloak, leaning on a staff, a mere dab of brown in the wide expanse of green. Straight ahead lie the great city and the plain that leads to the sea; to the right are the mountains that cluster about the Lake of Bracciano, while to the left is the Tiber Valley, and, beyond, at a distance of many miles, the purple barrier of the Sabine Hills.

The last stopping place before Rome is Prima Porta, which is only five miles from the Ponte Milvio. It is here that the Via Flaminia passes through a defile among the rocks, and it is here that the high ground ends, since the road for the rest of the way is along the level floor of the Tiber Valley.

Prima Porta consists of an old chapel and of two or three houses of a modern date. It can boast of some ruins in its neighbourhood, but the interest of the little posting-place—once the scene of so much bustle and excitement—is gone for ever. Just beyond Prima Porta the road, as it crosses a stream, has been diverted from



86.—THE RUINED CASTLE NEAR THE PONTE FELICE, BORGHETTO.





## From Castelnuovo to Rome

the original track, but the old road and the old bridge have been left. They are shown in Plate 104. Across this bridge the priest and the little countess journeyed on their way to prison. The bridge is very venerable, and is rapidly becoming buried in creepers and in adventurous bush. It serves, however, to show how very narrow was the ancient highway.

The rest of the road to Rome, although a little uninteresting in the winter, is exceedingly beautiful in the beginning of May. It runs for some part of the distance at the foot of a steep cliff, having on the other side the level bank of the Tiber. This cliff and the slope between it and the road are ablaze with colour. There are innumerable acacia trees in bloom, while among the tangled undergrowth are masses of blue borage intermixed with a brilliant company of crimson poppies, or of thistles just breaking into flower. More beautiful even than these are the banks of fennel, where, hovering round a thousand slender stalks, nearly a fathom high, are twenty thousand clusters of gold spheres.

Before reaching the Ponte Milvio the road passes through a curious but pleasant part of the Campagna, which strikes the traveller as familiar, because it forms the scenery of so many religious pictures. Here is the landscape which is associated with the lives of numerous saints, and with the works of such artists as Poussin, who spent laborious years in Rome. Here is the road at the foot of the cliff along which the Virgin travels with the Babe. Here is the green, undulating country, with distant hills, with little patches of wood, with little islands of rock, with isolated mounds, capped by a house or a clump of trees, which seem

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

the native land of the Holy Family and a whole company of pious folk. Here, again, are the masses of ruined masonry, partly overgrown with bushes and partly converted into the dwellings of picturesque shepherds, which fascinated the landscape painters of some two centuries ago.

Another turn in the road and there come into view the River Tiber and the domes and spires of the city of Rome.

## 7. HOW THE PEOPLE OF THE STORY LOOKED

**I**N the narrative of the Franceschini tragedy the Yellow Book tells of many things, but it fails to furnish any account of the personal appearance of the men and women who played their parts in the drama. We can only imagine them as people representative of certain crude characters which figure in the stories of all time and which have been familiar to the listening world ever since tales were told. Guido is the sour, malignant villain; Paolo the sleek, smiling plotter of plots; Caponsacchi the handsome, open-hearted hero; and Pompilia the beautiful, pathetic, lamentable lady.

Although their faces are blurred and the light in their eyes has vanished, the dress they wore is preserved to us through many contemporary paintings and prints; and thus it is possible to picture them moving among the scenes that have just been described.\*

This lean priest, stepping warily from stone to stone across the muddy Corso and attired much as priests are attired at the present day, is the Abate Paolo. The elderly couple walking down the Via Vittoria on their way to church are Pietro and Violante Comparini. He wears a black cloth hat with a wide oval brim and a

\* Among the many pictures illustrative of this matter an excellent example is afforded by the painting on parchment by Baur in the Borghese Gallery in Rome, showing the façade of the Borghese Palace in the seventeenth century, with a very remarkable crowd of people of all ranks disposed in the open square before the building.

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

high crown. It is a jaunty hat, for the brim can be tilted many ways. It is the hat of the time, ranging from a very shapely model when worn by the noble, to a mere flapping rag when asprawl on the head of a labourer. The old gentleman is clad in a tunic of dark stuff with possibly some pattern on it. Below the tunic are baggy breeches, in hue blue or black, and then stockings and shoes. If the day be Sunday, Pietro would probably display a tuft of ribbons at the knee, or, should the weather be cold, would wear a cloak—a mere square of black cloth thrown carelessly over one shoulder and draped loosely round the body.

The smarter young men who came from the great houses in the Via Bocca di Leone would be more gaily dressed. Their coats would be longer and the collar and cuffs of a different colour from the body. Thus a grey tunic with red cuffs would be quite in the mode, while a yellow coat worn under a blue cloak would attract no more than flattering attention. Round silk pompons at the knee, in the place of the ribbons, seem to have been very chic at this period. A wide, white linen collar was, at the same time, a mark of distinction to which the humbler folk made no claim.

Violante appears in a close-fitting bodice, a little low at the neck, with a high waist and with sleeves of a different colour from the rest. The dress is quite plain, while above it is an overskirt, reaching to the knee and presenting some contrast in the matter of tint. Over the head and shoulders she wears a mantilla, possibly moulded a little to the head so as to look somewhat like a hood. A younger woman who passes her by has her mantilla delicately ornamented across



87.—THE GORGE AT CIVITA CASTELLANA.



## How the People of the Story Looked

the forehead. Violante displays a silver comb in her hair, wears large earrings and a simple necklace. When she received the Abate Paolo in the parlour in the Via Vittoria to discuss Pompilia's dowry, one may expect that she wore, over her simple dress, an embroidered apron which had descended to her from her grandmother.

The two unclean men arguing across the table of a poor wine shop at Vitiano are Gambassini and Agostinelli. They are discussing Count Guido's terms for the carrying out of the triple murder in Rome. They are dressed as Guido himself was dressed when he was captured at Merluzza—namely, in a sack-like brown coat, worn over a vest of goats'-hair, with rough breeches and coarser stockings, and on their heads cotton caps covered by a thing of felt of doubtful colour, and shapeless.

Count Guido, as he walked the streets of Arezzo on his way to his friend the Governor, would be seen to wear a black tunic with a very elaborate pattern worked upon it in thread of a brighter colour than the cloth itself. Very possibly, too, if he was in the mood to be gay, there would be a tuft of feathers in his hat.

As to Pompilia's appearance we know nothing, except that she was "a beautiful woman." I have wandered through every picture gallery in Rome and in Florence, seeking, among the crowds of faces of Italian women of years gone by, for the face of Pompilia. After scanning some hundreds of faces, many of them famous, a few of them beautiful, the majority of them so saintly as to be inhumanly insipid, I at last found

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Pompilia. She appears in Fra Filippo Lippi's picture of the Madonna in the Pitti Palace at Florence. A reproduction of Brother Lippi's Madonna appears as the Frontispiece of this book.

This beautiful face is that of a girl of about seventeen, very still and pathetic, a little weary it may be, and yet with an expression of determination about the dainty mouth that is unexpected. She has the eyes of a fawn, pretty hair, and a head-dress that is half girlish, half matronly. The slight tilt of her nose saves her face from being classical and formal. She is a little woman assuredly, delicate looking, and one who would seem to have met with little joy in her short life. Scanning her face one can understand how she succeeded in persuading Caponsacchi to take her away from Arezzo, how her devotion to him became unfathomable, how she defied her husband when he confronted her at the inn at Castelnovo and yet how she generously forgave him as she lay dying in the familiar house in Rome. It is the face of a guileless woman, tender, patient, sympathetic, earnest and supremely feminine.

We know from Count Guido's list of the articles he declared that she carried away with her what might have been the particulars of her dress and the character of the ornaments she wore, or might have worn. One can imagine her decked in her best dress as she makes her way to the theatre, where she first met Caponsacchi face to face. It was, according to the inventory, "a damask suit with its mantle and a petticoat of a poppy colour embroidered with various flowers." Around the slender neck, I am sure, was "the collar of crumpled silk." With this costume would be worn the light





88.—A STREET IN CIVITA CASTELLANA.



## How the People of the Story Looked

blue stockings and the shoes with silver buckles that are mentioned in the list. I fancy, too, that she would wear the "pair of ear-rings in the shape of a little ship of gold." Pompilia may always be associated with this little ship of gold, since she entrusted all her treasure to one poor argosy, too frail for the darkening sea she ventured on.

When she ran away with Caponsacchi from Arezzo, I think that she wore her "snuff-coloured worsted bodice with petticoat ornamented with white and red pawns," and that over this was spread the "apron of key-bit pattern with its lace," while about her shoulders was wrapped that "scarf of black taffeta with a bow of ribbon" of which mention is made. I feel sure that she had with her the little ship of gold, and that her heart failed her utterly when this precious emblem was wrested from her in the jail at Castelnuovo.

Pompilia's flight from Arezzo to Rome, had been no other than the despairing voyage of a girl in a little ship that, slight as it proved to be, was to her a ship of gold.





## THE PEOPLE OF THE STORY AS THEY APPEAR IN THE POEM

“**T**HE Ring and the Book” is a poem of considerable length, occupying, indeed, twelve books and over twenty-one thousand lines. It tells the same story no fewer than ten times over in a series of monologues. In each telling the events which occurred are viewed and discussed from a different standpoint. It may be supposed that so much repetition is wearisome, but, on the contrary, the interest never wanes until the reader has heard to the end all that those who are concerned in the story have to say about its tragic circumstances.

The first book gives a plain, impartial summary of the whole affair, such an account as would be presented in a news-letter of the day. In the second book the tale is told by one of the many in Rome who took the side of the husband. It is a reproduction of the inevitable gossip that babbled through every street of the city when the private doings of husband and wife became common knowledge. The third book also is “another sample speech i’ the market-place,” expressing the view of those who had sympathy with the wife.

There then follows a cold dissertation by a speaker who inclined neither to the one side nor the other. It is the commentary of the salon cynic, of “the critical mind,” of the callous man who would sum the matter up as he would sort counters, who would weigh the pros

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and cons of the case in a merchant's balance, and, at the same time, assure the world that his estimate of men and women was, in general terms, low. It is the speech of the person of position who regards all those who are not of his set as "the mob."

Next comes the speech of Count Guido Franceschini, the one he made before the Court in his own defence, after he had passed the ordeal of the torture. It is supplemented by a second monologue, later in the book, which embodies his last frantic utterances, blurted out in the condemned cell before he was led away to execution.

After this Caponsacchi speaks. He tells the whole story over again as it arose and grew within his knowledge. It is the speech delivered before the tribunal in justification of himself and in vindication of the good name of the lady he sought to serve. Next comes Pompilia's account of her sad, brief life, told as she was lying on her death-bed. She speaks with infinite candour and earnestness, and with such beauty of language that her confession stands out as the most superb portion of the book.

Twice again is the whole story traversed in the lawyers' pleadings; first, by the advocate who conducted the defence, and then by his colleague who undertook the prosecution on behalf of the Treasury.

Last of all comes the Pope's utterance on the entire affair. He passes in review the varied and violent circumstances of the tragedy, and pronounces judgment upon all who were in any way concerned therewith. It is through the mouth of the Pope that the poet reveals the tenor of his own mind.



89.—THE VALLEY TO THE SOUTH OF CIVITA CASTELLANA, FROM THE ROAD TO ROME.





## I. THE COMPARINI

THE Comparini were, the poem says, "of the modest middle class" and "of good repute." Violante was a "stirring, striving" woman, an ingenious schemer, "quick at the by-road and the cross-cut," kind of heart, yet unwise, a maker of mischief, yet a woman of blundering good intent. Pietro, on the other hand, "a good, fat, rosy, careless man," was stupid and credulous, and a mere tool in the hands of his wife. He had a great affection for Pompilia, the child he believed to be his daughter, was opposed to her marriage, and charmed by the thought of her coming back to the Via Vittoria again after the affair at Arezzo.

"Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,  
And laugh 'But how you dreamed uneasily!  
I saw the great drops stand here on your brow—  
Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss?'  
No, indeed, darling!"

In the discreditable matter of the dowry contract Pietro was no party to the cheat. In this transaction

"Guido gives  
Money for money—and they, bride for groom,  
Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child."

On behalf of the Comparini it must be said that what they did—lamentable as it proved to be—was done for the supposed good of the child, while even Violante's

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

"leadeneſt of lies" was uttered without deliberate thought of wickedneſs.

They "did their beſt  
Part God's way, part the other way than God's,  
To ſomehow make a ſhift and ſcramble through  
The world's mud, careleſs if it ſplashed and ſpoiled,  
Provided they might ſo hold high, keep clean  
Their child's ſoul, one ſoul white enough for three,  
And lift it to whatever ſtar ſhould ſtoop."

Violante pitted her wits againſt thoſe of the Abate Paolo and at the ouſet the abate won. The interview between the two was a matter of profound concern, for upon its iſſue hung the fates of thoſe who were neareſt to them both. The interview took place in the Via Vittoria. The Abate Paolo called one afternoon and was admitted :

"Might he ſpeak ?  
Yeſ—to Violante ſomehow caught alone  
While Pietro took his after-dinner doze,  
And the young maiden, buſily as befits,  
Minded her broider-frame three chambers off.  
So—giving now his great flap-hat a gloſs  
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, ſoothing now  
The ſilk from out its creases o'er the calf,  
Setting the ſtocking clerical again,  
But never diſengaging, once engaged,  
The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her—  
He diſſertated on that Tuſcan houſe,  
Thoſe Franceschini——"

The wedding was clandestine and unknown to Pietro. It was, indeed, carried out with indecent ſecrecy a little while before the family left their home in the Via Vittoria for Arezzo. Pompilia deſcribes the ceremony, ſuch as it was, in the following words :



## The Comparini

"I was hurried through a storm,  
Next dark eve of December's dearest day—  
How it rained! through our street and the Lion's-mouth  
And the bit of Corso,—cloaked round, covered close,  
I was like something strange or contraband,—  
Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle,  
My mother keeping hold of me so tight,  
I fancied we were come to see a corpse  
Before the altar which she pulled me toward.  
There we found waiting an unpleasant priest  
Who proved the brother, not our parish friend,  
But one with mischief-making mouth and eye,  
Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then  
I heard the heavy church-door lock out help  
Behind us: for the customary warmth,  
Two tapers shivered on the altar. 'Quick—  
Lose no time!' cried the priest. And straightway down  
From . . . what's behind the altar where he hid—  
Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,  
Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I  
O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,  
Read here and there, made me say that and this,  
And after, told me I was now a wife."

Violante was anxious enough to go to Arezzo. She believed that there she would be rid of those money troubles that pressed so heavily in Rome, while in the Tuscan city she would find herself "gilt with an alien glory" and would, together with Pietro, be able to

"Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint  
The luxury of Lord-and-Lady-ship."

The miseries of their short sojourn at Arezzo are described by the Comparini in trenchant and bitter terms. In place of a luxuriant life in a palace, they found themselves housed as spectres in a sepulchre, picking garbage off a pewter plate. After

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

"Four months' probation of this purgatory,  
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast . . . .  
Four months' taste of apportioned insolence,  
Cruelty graduated, dose by dose ;  
The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes  
Broke at last in their desperation loose,  
Fled away for their lives, and lucky so."

Violante's confession, inevitable as it was, came upon Pompilia as a cruel and paralysing blow. It seemed to the girl as if the mother she adored "had stripped her naked to amuse the world," and that among the many ills heaped upon her this was the very bitterest. So far as Pompilia's life was concerned it was after this that

"The stealing, sombre element comes in  
Till all is black or blood-red in the piece."

## II. THE FRANCESCHINI

**G**UIDO'S mother, the "grey mother with a monkey-mien, mopping and mowing," fares ill in the book. The Pope calls her "a gaunt nightmare who turned motherhood to shame and womanliness to loathing." The callousness with which she connived at all the cruelty inflicted upon Pompilia exposes her to the world as an inhuman wretch.

The "cat-clawed" Canon Girolamo was a loathsome hybrid, neither fox nor wolf, but combining in some contemptible degree the craft of one and the violence of the other.

The Abate Paolo, the "fox-faced" priest, holds a conspicuous place in the poem. It was his shrewdness and intelligence that gave point and power to the crude schemes of the Franceschini family. He was throughout the moving spirit in the tragedy. It was he who supplied the brains, and although he was outwitted by Violante in the end, he came near to securing a great triumph in sheer devilry. As Guido was represented as being forty-six years of age when the story opened, it was necessary that Browning should make Paolo a younger brother, although he was, in point of fact, the eldest of the family. He is described as smooth-mannered, soft-speeched, sleek-cheeked, as a hypocrite as well as a brute, as a man who lived for greed, ambition, lust and revenge, and who would have robbed sick folk in the temple porch.

### III. POMPILIA

POMPILIA, so the book affirms, was young, good and beautiful, with large dark eyes and a bounty of black hair. Her face was pale and her expression grave and griefful, like that of our Lady of All the Sorrows. One who saw her on her death-bed believed

"A lovelier face is not in Rome . . .

Shaped like a peacock's egg."

Caponsacchi speaks of her appearance in these words :

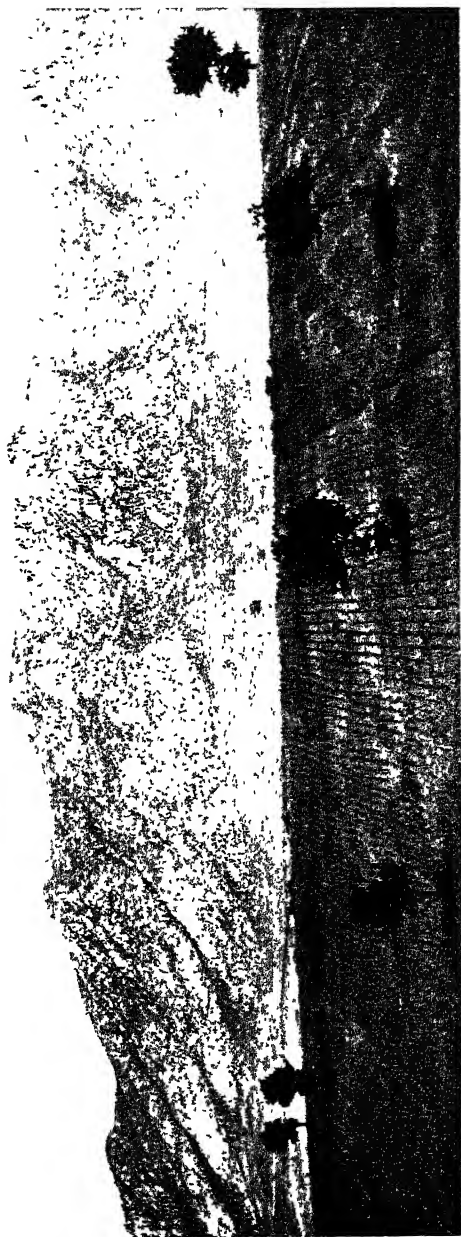
"Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,  
Painters would say ; they like the straight-up Greek :  
This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown  
Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves,  
And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,  
Looked out of such a sad, sweet heaven on me—  
The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,  
Careful for a whole world of sin and pain."

As she lay dying in the hospital, where she had been taken after Guido's murderous attack, she gives the story of her life.\*

"Another day that finds her living yet,  
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow  
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,  
And, under the white hospital-array,  
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise  
You'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,  
Alive i' the ruins."

\* In point of fact she died in the house in the Via Vittoria in which the murder took place.





91.—MONTE SORACTE, FROM THE HIGH ROAD NEAR RIGNANO.



## Pompilia

She tells her story in simple words and in the manner of a child. Looking back over her confused, tragic, broken life, she finds it all a mystery and unsubstantial. "My life," she says, "looks old, fantastic and impossible. I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades, even to my babe, till even he withdraws into a dream."

"So with my husband—just such a surprise,  
Such a mistake, in that relationship!  
Everyone says that husbands love their wives,  
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;  
  . . . . well,  
You see how much of this comes true in mine!  
People indeed would fain have somehow proved  
He was no husband: but he did not hear,  
Or would not wait, and so has killed us all."

Having known little but sorrow all her days, she wonders at the mystery of existence, as a child wonders at an illness that strikes it with sudden pain and blots out, like a chill cloud, all the glamour of life. Her marriage is a wonder to her, for she hardly knew at the time what a husband meant. Arezzo is a fathomless blank, while the three years of sorrow spent in that town stand out in her memory as an unintelligible void.

In the whole of the long, pitiable story there is never an unkind word and never a reproach. She upbraids no one; she condemns no one, while never does she assume the pose of a martyr or clamour for pity. She generously forgives "that most woeful man, her husband," without one word of rancour or bitterness. She seeks to lessen the harshness of Violante's crime, thinks even that it was good for her and "good

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

for Pietro, who was meant to love a babe," while of her "poor faulty mother," she is happy to think she "died the easier by what price I fetched." In the end she pours forth her heart in adoration of the man who lifted her out of the slough of despond.

She speaks very prettily of her boy, of "that little life so detached, so left all to itself." She leaves it to the care of God, "who knows I am not by."

"Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black  
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,  
Trying to talk? . . . .  
All women are not mothers of a boy,  
Though they live twice the length of my whole life,  
And, as they fancy, happily all the same.  
There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,  
As if it would continue, broaden out  
Happily more and more, and lead to Heaven :  
Christmas before me—was not that a chance?  
I never realised God's birth before—  
How he grew likest God in being born . . . .  
When he grows up and gets to be my age,  
He will seem hardly more than a great boy ;  
And if he asks, 'What was my mother like?'  
People may answer, 'Like girls of seventeen'—  
And how can he but think of this and that,  
Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush  
When he regards them as such boys may do?  
I fancy him grown great,  
Strong, stern, a tall young man who tutors me,  
Frowns with the others, 'Poor imprudent child !  
Why did you venture out of the safe street?  
Why go so far from help to that lone house?  
Why open at the whisper and the knock?'"

She dwells at some length upon her life at Arezzo, in that "fell house of hate" where first Guido "laid a hand on her that burned all peace." She realises

## Pompilia

that no matter what she did no good resulted, and that her endeavours only served to increase her husband's hate. She deals with the subject of the so-called love letters, and proves that she was not only innocent of sending them, but that she neither knew nor cared what they purported to convey. She had some insight into Guido's plot to entrap her, and was aware that the maid Maria Margherita was both false to her and bent upon accomplishing her ruin. She felt that her husband was cruel, not merely that he might hurt her, but that through her he might hurt others. As for the reason for his hate it remains, like so much besides in the wretched house, a matter of blank mystery. Although she makes little of her own unhappiness there are others who tell

“how the little solitary wife  
Wept and looked out of window all day long.”

how

“All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,  
On either side Pompilia's path of life,  
Built round about and over against by fear,  
Circumvallated month by month, and week  
By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,  
Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,  
No outlet from the encroaching pain save just  
Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven,  
Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap. . .  
Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more  
And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,  
Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, ‘This way,  
Out by me! Hesitate one moment more  
And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you!  
Here my hand holds you life out!’ Whereupon  
She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew  
Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.”

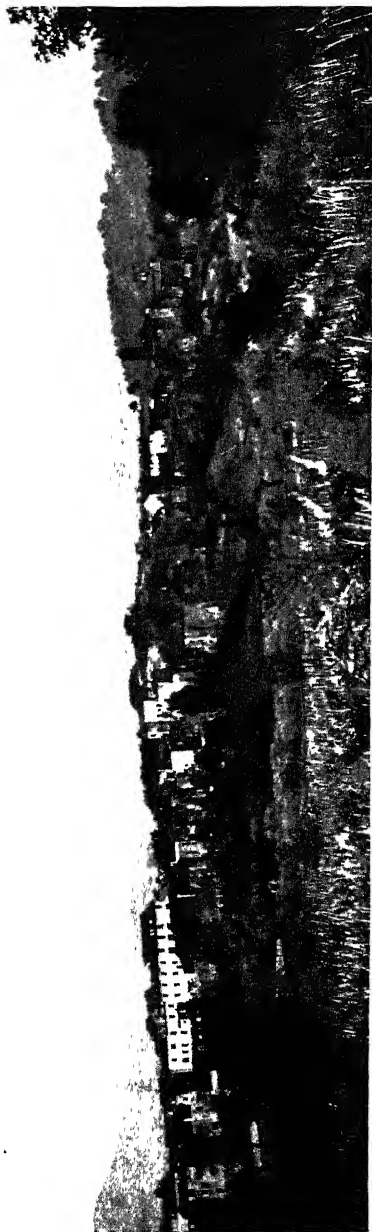
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

This was the purpose of all her husband's scheming, to "show the world their saint in a lover's arms, no matter how driven thither."

She tells of the episode at the theatre, in the last days of a carnival in March, of the throwing of the comfits and of her seeing Caponsacchi face to face for the first time.

In passages of remarkable beauty she speaks of her resolve to fly away to Rome, tells of what it was that prompted her to go and of the magic moment when the impulse seized her.

"It had got half through April. I arose  
One vivid daybreak,—who had gone to bed  
In the old way my wont those last three years,  
Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.  
    . . . . My sole thought  
Being still, as night came, 'Done, another day!  
How good to sleep and so get nearer death!'—  
When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep  
With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,  
Light in me, light without me, everywhere  
Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall  
From heaven to earth,—a sudden drawbridge lay,  
Along which marched a myriad merry motes,  
Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed  
In rival dance, companions new-born too.  
On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed  
Shook diamonds on each dull grey lattice-square,  
As first one, then another bird leapt by,  
And light was off, and lo was back again,  
Always with one voice,—where are two such joys?  
The blessed building sparrow! I stepped forth,  
Stood on the terrace,—o'er the roofs, such sky!  
My heart sang, 'I, too, am to go away,  
I too have something I must care about,  
Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome!'"



92.—RIGNANO, THE LAST STOPPING-PLACE BEFORE CASTELNUOVO.





## Pompilia

Then comes the memorable journey, of which more is said elsewhere, and the moment when, utterly prostrated, she arrives at Castelnuevo. It was then, she says, that

“Something like a white wave o’ the sea  
Broke o’er my brain and buried me in sleep.”

Of her awakening, and of her meeting with her husband in the little room at the inn, she speaks as follows:

“Where was I found but on a strange bed  
In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,  
Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front  
Whom but the man you call my husband, ay—  
Count Guido once more between heaven and me,  
For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes—  
That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,  
Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands  
Of men who looked up in my husband’s face  
To take the fate thence he would signify,  
Just as the way was at Arezzo: then,  
Not for my sake but his who had helped me—  
I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized  
The sword o’ the felon, trembling at his side,  
Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing  
And would have pinned him through the poison-bag  
To the wall and left him there to palpitate,  
As you serve scorpions, but men interposed—  
Disarmed me, gave his life to him again  
That he might take mine and the other lives,  
And he has done so. I submit myself.”

She speaks with gratitude of her days spent in the convent after arrest at Castelnuevo. It was here that she found

“The uttermost of my heart’s desire, a truce  
From torture and Arezzo, balm for hurt  
With the quiet nuns,—God recompense the good!  
Who said and sang away the ugly past.”

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Of the hideous tragedy that brought her life to an end she says little, but as she lies upon her death-bed she frankly forgives her husband all that he has done.

"For that most woeful man my husband once,  
Who, needing respite, still draws vital breath,  
I—pardon him? So far as lies in me,  
I give him for his good the life he takes,  
Praying the world will therefore acquiesce.  
Let him make God amends—none, none to me  
Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate  
Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,  
Himself this way at least pronounced divorce,  
Blotted the marriage-bond: this blood of mine  
Flies forth exultingly at any door,  
Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.  
We shall not meet in this world nor the next,  
But where will God be absent? In His face  
Is light, but in His shadow healing too:  
Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!"

From the manner of the telling of her story, from the words spoken by her friends, Pompilia stands revealed as a woman exquisitely feminine, lovable and loving, gentle, patient, submissive and self-effacing, generous and noble-hearted, tender as a child and yet possessed, when the safety of her babe was threatened, with the courage of a lioness. One circumstance in her life—her flight from her husband's house—needs to be explained and justified, while the merits of her relationship with Caponsacchi stand forth for judgment.

From one point of view we have here a girl, who, although married very young, was wedded to a man of her parents' choosing. These two old people, foolish and deluded as they may have been, were held to be of good repute in the eyes of the world. Pompilia's



93.—THE TOWN OF CASTELNUOVO.  
The Square Building on the Summit is the Pretura, where Pompilia was imprisoned.



## Pompilia

husband treated her with persistent cruelty and contempt, so that for three years and more her life was one of unabating misery. Would not her conduct have been more commendable, and, indeed, even heroic, if she had patiently endured this torture, and had without flinching fulfilled her duties as a wife? Instead of being steadfast to the end, she flies away secretly in the dark of the night with a sprightly and handsome man of twenty-three. If there be no more in the story than this, how is it possible that Pompilia's deliberate step can be regarded not only as justifiable, but as worthy of praise and, indeed, of fervid admiration?

Viewed, however, from another and fuller point of view the case stands thus. She was little more than a child when the chronicle opens. She was, as she says, "in a strange town with no familiar face." Not only was every day of her existence a day of misery, but her life was in danger. She was convinced beyond all arguing that in some fashion or another she would be done to death. Her presence in the house did harm, not good. She served only to arouse and aggravate her husband's vilest passions. To her brother-in-law she was merely the object of dishonourable designs, while to the aged countess she proved no more than an incentive to malice and ill usage. She was polluted by association with such a man as Guido Franceschini. He not only blotted out all joy from her being, but he degraded her and dragged her down with him into the mire. As she exclaims, when he would seize her at Castelnuevo :

"My soul is mine, my body is my soul's . . .  
At least and for ever I am mine and God's,  
Never again degraded to be yours."

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Possibly it might with justice be allowed that, in the sum of these dire circumstances, she had reason and to spare for her flight from Arezzo, yet in her account of why she fled she talks of none of these things. She made her escape from her husband's house for a reason so compelling that it came to her almost as a Divine command. She fled to save the life of her unborn child. It was the mother's instinct that led her to seek, at all costs, a place of safety. "God put it in my head to fly," she says, "to obey the clear voice which bade me rise, not for my own sake, but my babe unborn." When she begged Caponsacchi to take her to Rome, to take her as he would take a dog "left masterless for strangers to maltreat," she made only this one plea. These are her words to the priest:

"Here is the-service. Since a long while now,  
I am in course of being put to death:  
While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed  
The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.  
Now I imperil something more, it seems,  
Something that's trulier me than this myself,  
Something I trust in God and you to save . . .  
I have more life to save than mine."

One other reason she named which makes prominent her absolute unselfishness. She says at another time, to Caponsacchi:

"How strange  
It is, my husband whom I have not wronged  
Should hate and harm me. For his own soul's sake  
Hinder the harm!"

As to the companion in her flight, it was impossible that she could escape to Rome alone. Neither could she make the journey with a maid-servant, nor with a

## Pompilia

woman friend. Travelling in those days was difficult and dangerous, the times were licentious, footpads haunted every road, while the protection of the law was feeble when not actually lacking. The condition of the roads in Italy at this period is to be gathered from an entry in the diary of John Evelyn. That gentleman was travelling on horseback in 1645 through the country just to the south of Rome. He writes: "The day following, we were fain to hire a strong convoy of about thirty firelocks, to guard us through the cork woods (much infested with the banditti) as far as Fossa Nuova, where was the Forum Apii."

Pompilia had applied to Canon Conti, a relation and friend of the Franceschini, and a common-sense man of the world. Failing Guillichini, the first name suggested, he had advised her to seek the help of Caponsacchi. What else could this lonely woman do? She speaks honestly when she says:

"Earth was made hell to me who did no harm :  
I only could emerge one way from hell  
By catching at the one hand held me, so  
I caught at it and thereby stepped to Heaven :  
If that be wrong, do with me what you will !"

As regards Pompilia's relation to Caponsacchi, it is necessary to remember that at the time she met him she was fast budding into womanhood. Her experience of men had been woefully unfortunate. With the exception of old Pietro Comparini she had grounds for regarding all men with general distrust, if not with an instinctive dislike. Her husband—to whom she was married before she knew what marriage meant—was a brutal ruffian, who bestowed upon her nothing but

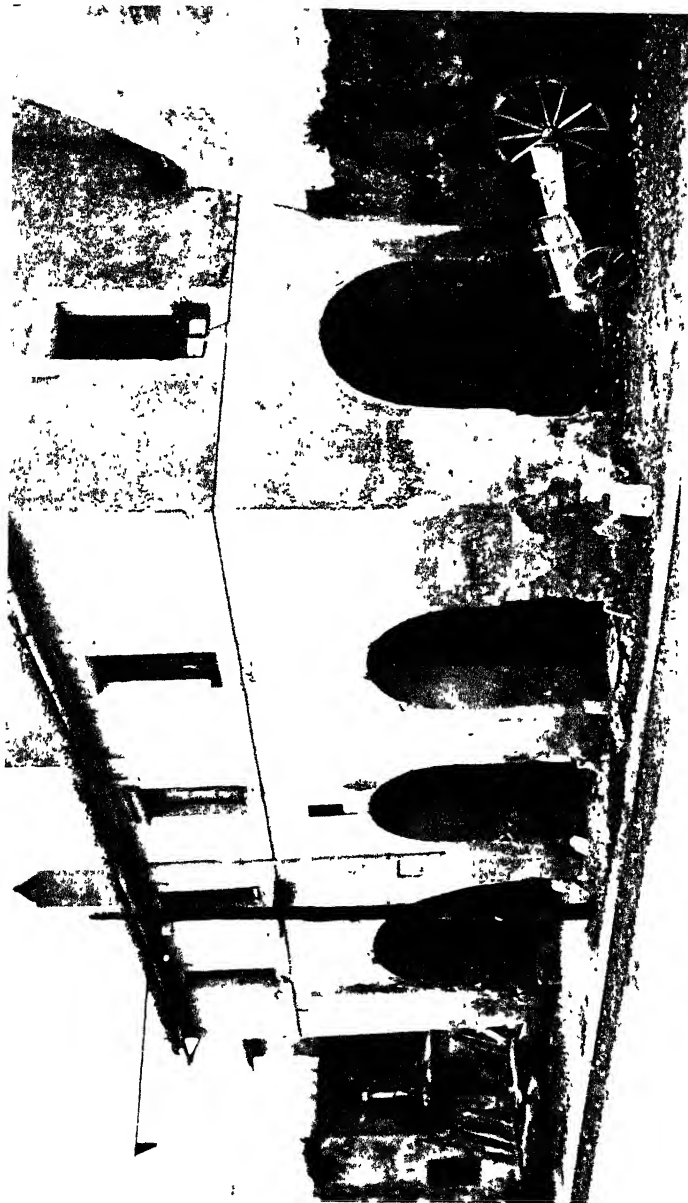
## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

hate. Of the two other Franceschini, one, the Abate Paolo, was a foxy-faced priest, as cruel as he was mean, while the other, the Canon Girolamo, was no more than a contemptible scoundrel. Neither the Governor nor the Bishop of Arezzo could have filled her with any esteem for men, while those who visited at the house, Canon Conti and Signor Guillichini for example, regarded her with a pity she was too proud to accept. It must have seemed to her that all with whom she was surrounded were party to her misery and tolerant of her degradation.

Then came the great crisis of her life. She resolved to fly in order to save the life of her child. She was about to take a leap in the dark. She sprang and found herself in the arms of a man who was young and handsome certainly, but also strong, determined and courageous. Above all—and this must have been her strangest experience—he was kind and gentle. Her husband treated her like a dog, this man approached her with a homage that raised her at once to a position of dignity and worshipful respect.

Considering Caponsacchi's personal qualities and considering the service he rendered her, can it be a matter of surprise that she regarded him as a being sent from God? Can it be wondered that she poured out her heart to him, that she threw herself at his feet, that for the rest of her short life she bestowed upon him the most fervent devotion? She repudiated with indignation the suggestion that she and the priest were lovers. The term "lover," as her detractors used it, was a term so vulgarised, so indiscriminating, so faulty that she scorned the idea that it could express the tie that





94.—THE INN AT CASTELNUOVO WHERE POMPILIA AND CAPONSACCHI WERE  
DISCOVERED BY COUNT GUIDO.



## Pompilia

bound her to Caponsacchi. He was her "sole friend, guardian and saviour." "He is mine," she cries, "my Caponsacchi!" "This man restored my soul," "This one heart brought me all the spring."

The passages in "The Ring and the Book" which deal with these two, with this despairing girl and the resolute, unselfish man, are among the most beautiful to be found in the poetry of any country or any age.

As Pompilia lies on her death-bed her last words are for Caponsacchi. She revels in her worship of him. She defends him against his traducers as a tigress defends its wounded mate, and with the last breath in her body she comforts him as only an adoring woman can, and bestows upon him the farewell blessing of "her immeasurable love."

It was during the flight of the two to Rome that the change wrought in her life by the coming of this man was made suddenly manifest to her. On the way Caponsacchi assures her that in a few hours there will be no more of the terrible journey, to which she replies:

"No more o' the journey : if it might but last !  
Always, my life-long, thus to journey still !  
It is the interruption that I dread—  
With no dread, ever to be here and thus !  
Never to see a face nor hear a voice !  
Yours is no voice ; you speak when you are dumb ;  
Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want  
No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."

Later on, when the journey was over, and she was looking back upon the past, she says :

"I did think, do think, in the thought shall die,  
That to have Caponsacchi for my guide,  
Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Holding my hand across the world—a sense  
That reads, as only such can read, the mark  
God sets on woman, signifying so  
She should—shall peradventure—be divine."

Finally, at the very end, when she was dying, and when she had commended her child to the care of God, she takes farewell of her "one friend" in the following words, and sends him a message:

"O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,  
No work begun shall ever pause for death!  
Love will be helpful to me more and more  
I' the coming course, the new path I must tread,  
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that! . . .  
Tell him,—I know not wherefore the true word  
Should fade and fall unuttered at the last—  
It was the name of him I sprang to meet  
When came the knock, the summons and the end.  
'My great heart, my strong hand are back again!'  
I would have sprung to these, beckoning across  
Murder and hell gigantic and distinct  
O' the threshold, posted to exclude me Heaven:  
He is ordained to call and I to come!"

#### IV. CAPONSACCHI

CAPONSACCHI is described in the book as a "young, frank, personable priest," "a courtly, spiritual Cupid, squire of dames," a man bold and handsome, with "a polished presence, a genteel manner, wit at will." He was a younger son of an old and illustrious family originally from Fiesole, but later from Florence, where was the Caponsacchi Palace. He entered the priesthood somewhat against his will. He was well-to-do and a favourite in society, a writer of little poems and rather given to frivolity. In his account of himself he does not claim that his early life was blameless.

He tells of the part he played in the drama in his speech before the Court, a speech made in defence of himself and of the lady he served—made, too, at the moment when Pompilia was dying. It is a manly, clear-ringing speech, so vivid in its utterance that the listener can see the figure of this strong, determined man standing before his judges and demanding in a voice of thunder that they hear nothing but the bare, clean truth. We can see him, as others saw him at the time, "the seeming-solitary man speaking for God," and can hear his words ring through that "grim, black-panelled chamber, rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome."

It is a flashing, daring, defiant speech. He maintains

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

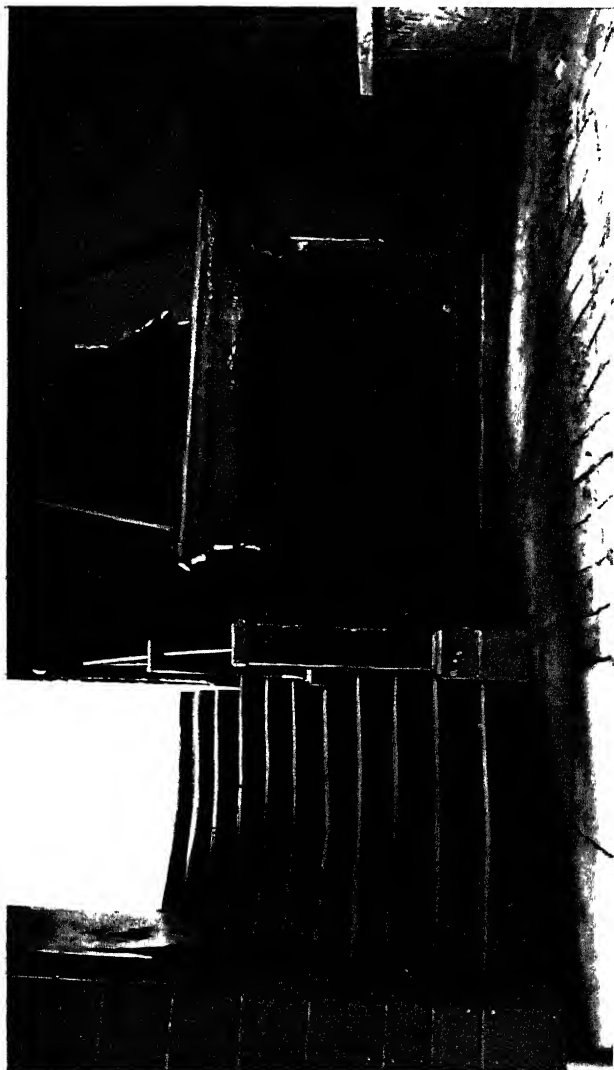
Pompilia's innocence and his own honour. He declines to discuss the viler of the charges made against them.

"Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can !  
For me, no word in my defence I speak,  
And God shall argue for the lady !"

He repudiates with indignation the hint that he was her lover, that he loved her in the way a creature such as Guido would call love. With withering scorn he flings back in their teeth the words of those who titter, "The priest's in love," and adds, with a sob, "Pompilia is only dying while I speak !" He avers that never a word passed between them which the Virgin might not hear :

"I never touched her with my finger-tip,  
Except to carry her to the couch that eve,  
Against my heart, beneath my head bowed low,  
As we priests carry the paten."

He took her away to Rome to save her life and that of her unborn babe. There was never another thought in her mind nor in his. What he did was "altogether for pity's sake," was consistent with his priesthood, was not an act of self-sacrifice, but a duty. "Duty to God is duty to her," he says, and claims that the saving of this fettered and unhappy woman was a devotional act, an act that he will uphold with pride to the end of his days. He believed, as she believed, that he was ordained to save her. He scorns all excuses. He spurns all fear of the world's opinion or of the Church's censure. He views the tribunal before which he stands with contempt, rebukes the judges as "fools, alike ignorant of God and man,"



95.—THE INTERIOR OF THE INN AT CASTELNUOVO.

The stone stair by which Pompilia ascended to her room.





## Caponsacchi

and says at last petulantly, "I have done with being judged."

He recalls all the details of the story, from the time when he first came face to face with Pompilia at the theatre and found her

"A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad."

He was well aware of Guido's hatred of Pompilia, and how he "plotted to plague her into overt sin and shame." He lashes the man without mercy, and points to him, as he writhes "miserably caught i' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies." He repudiates all knowledge of the love letters, and is furious at the evidence of the perjured maid, that "lackey of lies." He is convinced that Guido

"himself wrote those papers—from himself  
To himself—which, i' the name of me and her,  
His mistress-messenger gave her and me,  
Touching us with such pustules of the soul  
That she and I might take the taint, be shown  
To the world and shuddered over, speckled so."

He tells with what deliberation he finally undertook to rescue Pompilia, how long he pondered over the matter, and how clearly he saw that he would be blameworthy unless he carried out the task.

"One evening I was sitting in a muse  
Over the opened 'Summa,' darkened round  
By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life  
Had shaken under me—broke short indeed  
And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be—  
And into what abysm the soul may slip,  
Leave aspiration here, achievement there,  
Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes—  
Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,  
How utterly dissociated was I,

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

A priest and celibate, from the sad, strange wife  
Of Guido,—just as an instance to the point,  
Nought more,—how I had a whole store of strengths  
Eating into my heart, which craved employ,  
And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help."

He tells the story of the journey from Arezzo to Rome and recalls with affectionate tenderness every little detail of the way, although it wrings his heart to do so. He tells how Pompilia stepped out of the palace door dressed in black from head to foot, how white her hands and her face seemed by contrast, how little she spoke, and how she walked to the city gate and took her place in the carriage in silence.

"So it began, our flight thro' dusk to clear,  
Through day and night and day again to night  
Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all."

He tells how they passed Perugia and Assisi, treasures up every word she said and the curious, child-like questions she asked, and narrates how, when they heard the Angelus ring at sun-down, she begged him to read Gabriel's song in the place of the service for the hour. He wishes to recall everything she did, every "breath or look of hers," and regrets one particular half hour when he left her free, for, as he says, that would have been "one more half hour of her saved." He says that when they reached Foligno in the evening he begged her to stay and rest, but "Oh, no stay! she cried, in the fawn's cry, on to Rome, on, on!" Pompilia, in her own account of the journey, tells how glorious he made for her the world through which they passed, how towns, flowers and faces, and all things helped so well to make real the new earth that he had "woven around her."

## Caponsacchi

" 'This grey place was famous once,' said he—  
And he began that legend of the place  
As if in answer to the unspoken fear,  
And told me all about a brave man dead,  
Which lifted me and let my soul go on !  
How did he know too—at that town's approach  
By the rock-side—that in coming near the signs  
Of life, the house-roofs and the church and tower,  
I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world  
Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,  
As if the broken circlet joined again,  
Tightened itself about me with no break—  
As if the town would turn Arezzo's self—  
The husband there—the friends my enemies,  
All ranged against me."

Finally, Caponsacchi narrates how on the last evening, just when "the sky was fierce with colour from the sun setting," they came in sight of Castelnovo.

Of his anxiety at the post-house, and of how the journey ended, he speaks in the following words:

"I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.  
I listened—not one movement, not one sigh.  
'Fear not: she sleeps so sound!' they said—but I  
Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,  
Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,  
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,  
That, at first pause of night, pretence of grey,  
I made my mind up it was morn.—'Reach Rome,  
Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,  
Another long breath, and we emerge!' I stood  
I' the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms. 'Have out  
Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!' said I.  
While they made ready in the doubtful morn—  
'Twas the last minute—needs must I ascend  
And break her sleep; I turned to go.  
And there  
Faced me Count Guido."

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

He is bowed down with shame to think that at this encounter he could have killed the ruffian, could have killed him ere he killed his wife, but did not.

In order to inflict upon him the direst punishment he begs them to let Guido live :

“Leave Guido all alone  
Back on the world again that knows him now !  
I think he will be found (indulge so far !)  
Not to die so much as slide out of life,  
Pushed by the general horror and common hate  
Low, lower—left o’ the very ledge of things,  
I seem to see him catch convulsively  
One by one at all honest forms of life,  
At reason, order, decency and use—  
To cramp him and get foothold by at least ;  
And still they disengage them from his clutch.  
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged  
Off all the tableland whence life upsprings  
Aspiring to be immortality.  
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,  
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down  
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth  
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale :  
So I lose Guido in the loneliness,  
Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,  
At the horizontal line, creation’s verge,  
From what just is to absolute nothingness—  
Lo, what is this he meets, strains onward still ?  
What other man deep further in the fate,  
Who, turning at the prize of a footfall  
To flatter him and promise fellowship,  
Discovers in the act a frightful face—  
Judas, made monstrous by much solitude !  
The two are at one now ! Let them love their love  
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate  
That mops and mows and makes as it were love !  
There, let them each tear each in devil’s-fun,  
Or fondle this the other while malice aches—  
Both teach, both learn detestability ! ”



96.—THE LITTLE CHAPEL BETWEEN THE POST-HOUSE  
AND THE TOWN, CASTELNUOVO.



## Caponsacchi

He did not kill Franceschini, but, as he says to his judges, "I gave place to you and let the law reign paramount: I left Pompilia to your watch and ward, and now there and thus she lies."

As Caponsacchi's speech nears the end he turns once more to Pompilia, speaks of her with reverential admiration, and in tones of despair, for, as he says, "You see, we are so very pitiable, she and I." To him she is the glory of life, the beauty of the world, the wonderful white soul. He was blessed by the revelation of Pompilia, he "had been lifted up to the level of her" and with gratitude he exclaims, "She has done the good to me." Of the depth and power of the attachment between them, he says only this, "She called me far beyond friend."

He recalls her appearance. He remembers the first look she gave him, the gaze that

"burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes."

He recalls her voice, "that voice immortal, oh! that voice of hers," and tells that music seemed always to hover just above her lips.

He breaks out into passionate despair as he pictures what life would be with the companionship of such a woman as Pompilia, how complete would be the joy merely "to live and see her learn and learn by her," while in the place of this is "the old solitary nothingness." He brings his speech abruptly to an end with the words:

"O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

V. GUIDO

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI was the head of an old noble house, of a family

"old  
To that degree they could afford be poor  
Better than most."

Poor they certainly were and to a degree but little short of wretchedness. It was lack of money, together with a ravenous greed for money, that proved to be Guido's undoing. A love of gold formed in time the sole ray of light that glowed in a heart, filled otherwise with black hate and the brooding clouds of revenge.

According to the poem, Guido was already forty-six years old when first he met Pompilia. He was a mean-looking little man, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk and lantern-jawed. His wife says that he was "nothing like so tall as I myself," while others describe him as lean, yellow, mis-featured, beak-nosed, bushy-bearded and black-haired.

Of his moral worth there is little that is favourable to be recorded. If one fervent partisan speaks of him as "all conscience and all courage," others describe him as "a prodigy of crime," "part man, part monster," while one of Pompilia's allies does not hesitate to affirm that it would

"beggar hell's regalia to enrich  
Count Guido Franceschini."



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

himself loaded with ignominy; he, who had done no wrong, found himself degraded, he who sought only to "do God's bidding and man's duty," found himself the object of scorn and ridicule and "the world's face an universal grin."

After the Comparini had departed from Arezzo he was

"left alone  
With his immense hate and, the solitary  
Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife."

He might have turned her out of doors, as so many of his friends advised, but he determined, as he says, to

"keep the puppet of my foes—  
Her voice that lisps me back their curse—her eye  
They lend their leer of triumph to—her lip  
I touch and taste their very filth upon."

Moreover, Count Guido had another scheme in view. He was determined to revenge himself upon the crafty Comparini and, at the same time, to blast with his detestation "that mongrel brat" his wife. Viper though she was, she was young, pretty and unsuspecting. Although she filled him only with "vapid disgust" and was no more than a "nullity in female shape," there were younger men who would think her fascinating. The course to pursue was obvious.

"What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,  
Should take, as though spontaneously, the road  
It were impolitic to thrust her on?  
If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,  
Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,  
Branded as runaway not castaway,



97.—A STREET IN CASTELNUOVO.



## Guido

Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act ?  
So should the loathed form and detested face  
Launch themselves into hell and there be lost  
While he look o'er the brink with folded arms."

Guido Franceschini's scheme, however, did not succeed in the way he intended. His wife, it was true, had run away, but she was not thereby launched into hell, so that he was denied the delight of looking over the brink of the pit to watch her writhings. The Comparini were victorious again. Guido had lost the dowry; he had lost his wife; he could not even say, "Mine she is if I please wring her neck." She was safe from neck-wrangling with her foster parents in Rome, in the very house in the Via Vittoria where he had first seen her.

He sums up his position very graphically in the following passage from the speech he made before the tribunal in his own defence:

"I am irremediably beaten here—  
The gross illiterate vulgar couple—bah !  
Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,  
Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.  
They have got my name—'tis nailed now fast to theirs,  
The child or changeling is anyway my wife ;  
Point by point as they plan they execute,  
They gain all, and I lose all—even to the lure  
That led to loss—they have the wealth again  
They hazarded awhile to hook me with,  
Have caught the fish and find the bait entire :  
They even have their child or changeling back  
To trade with, turn to account a second time.  
They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,  
Covered my loudest cry for human aid  
With this enormous paving-stone of shame."

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

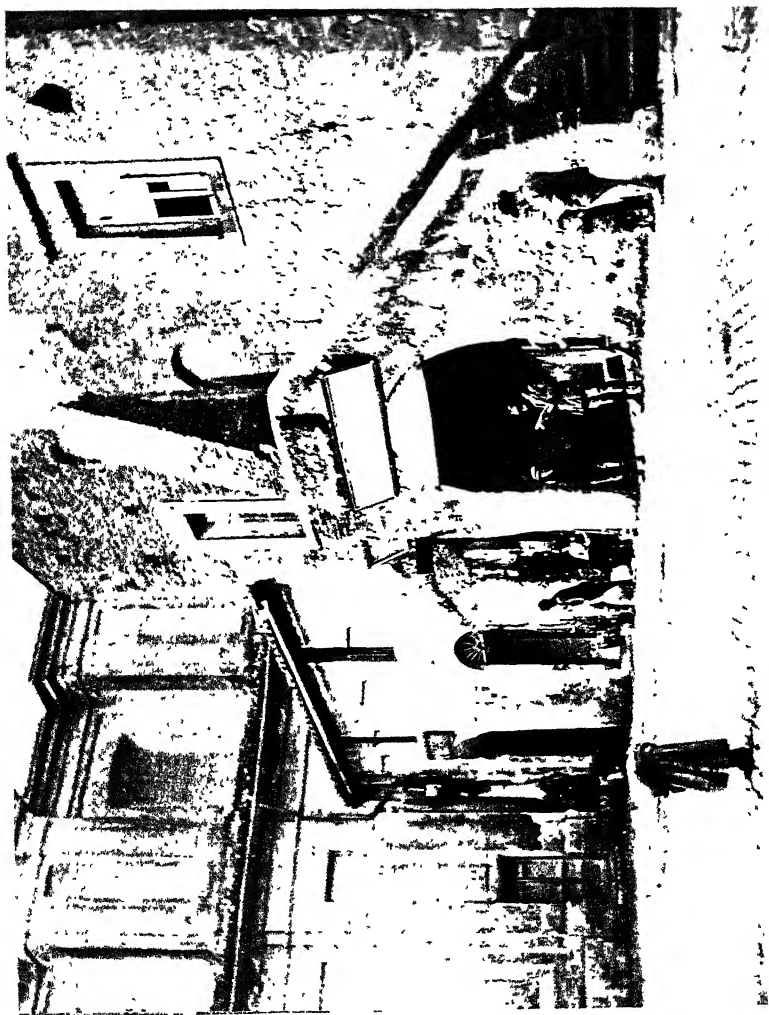
At the end, to crown all, had come the birth of the child—Caponsacchi's child, as he stoutly averred—the boy who would inherit the name of his ancient family, who would lord it in the old palace at Arezzo, and who, over the honoured roof, would keep displayed "the flag with the ordure on it," as a permanent evidence of the shame that had soiled the escutcheon of the Franceschini. Pompilia, he was well assured, would see the horrible devilry of this, and be content that no more could be done to complete his misery and utter humiliation.

He speaks of his furious ride from Arezzo to Castelnovo, and tells how he

"Floundered thro' day and night, another day  
And yet another night, and so at last,  
As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,  
Tumbled into the courtyard of an inn  
At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find,  
Even Caponsacchi."

Had he killed Caponsacchi and Pompilia at Castelnovo not a hand would have been raised against him, nor would a word of disapproval have been heard. He stayed his sword because he thought it right to leave the punishment of his wife's offence to the law. The law, however, failed him, gave him no redress, so he took the matter into his own hands. The sentence passed upon Pompilia at Arezzo provided justification for his final act. In what he did he was "law's mere executant," and, indeed, he boasts, "I dared and did it, trusting God and law."

As to the Comparini, they were parties to his wife's disgrace; they condoned and, in fact, openly approved



98 - THE PIAZZA DEL DUOMO, CASTELNUOVO.



## Guido

her infamous conduct. Moreover, was he not justified in retaliating upon those who had tricked and robbed him, and in seeking to wipe out, with their lives, the blot of scorn with which they had blackened his fair name?

The final proof of Pompilia's guilt, the final test that made her fault unanswerable, was the one word, "Caponsacchi," whispered outside the darkened door, a word that threw back bar and bolt as if an angel waited on the threshold. That name was "the pre-determined touch for truth."

Even at the last he might have paused, he says,

"Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing,  
Fronted me in the doorway—stood there faint  
With the recent pang, perhaps, of giving birth  
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child—  
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool  
Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age  
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,  
To practise and conspire against my peace—  
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.  
But it was she, the hag, she that brought hell  
For a dowry with her to her husband's house,  
She, the mock-mother, she that made the match  
And married me to perdition, spring and source  
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart  
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth—  
Violante Comparini, she it was,  
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,  
Opened: as if in turning from the Cross,  
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,  
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head  
Coiled with a leer at foot of it."

As he was murdering Pompilia the thought of  
Caponsacchi added fury to his loathing:



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

"I thought some few of the stabs were in his heart,  
Or had not been so lavish—less had served."

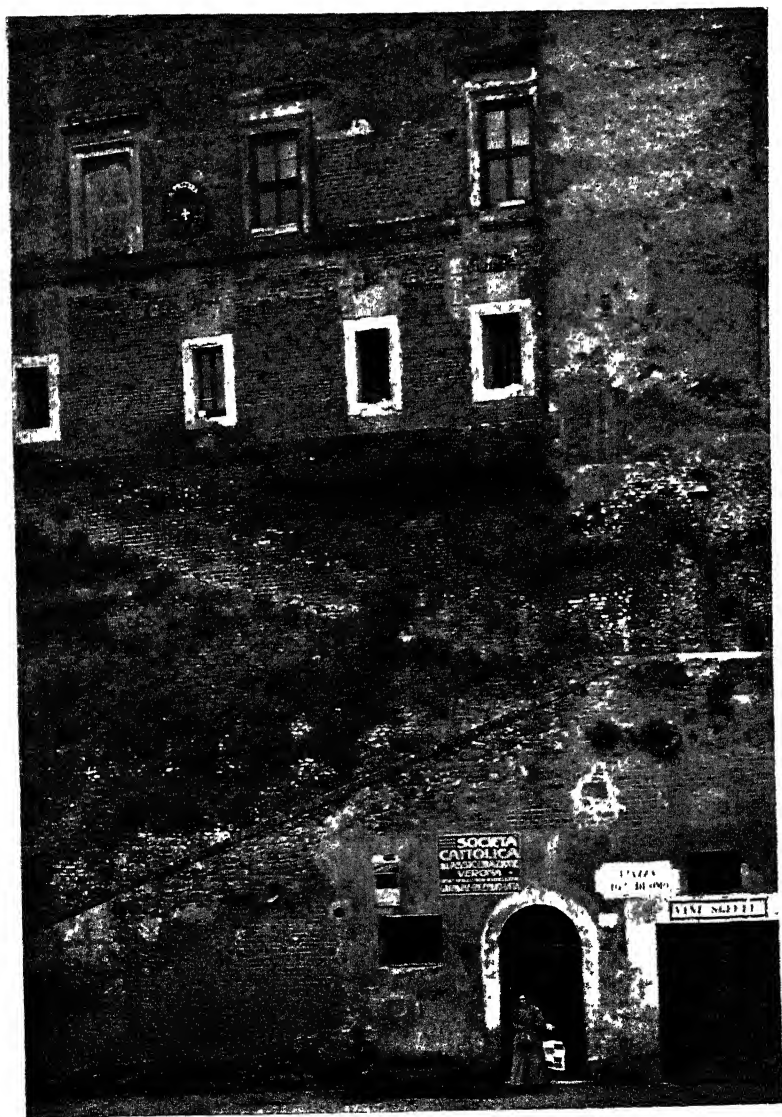
He makes little mention of the murder. That dreadful deed is told of elsewhere in the book. It is described how

"The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way  
Across the town by blind cuts and black turns . . . .  
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light  
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,  
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,  
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,  
And tongues that lolled—Oh God that madest man!  
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined—  
That was the policy and master stroke—  
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—  
'Open to Caponsacchi!' Guido cried:  
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,  
Showing the joyous couple and their child  
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves  
To them."

According to one speaker, there never was "so thorough a study of stabbing," while a third tells vividly how

"Pompilia rushes here and there  
Like a dove among lightnings in her brake,  
Falls also: Guido's, this last husband's-act,  
He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,  
Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,  
While the other tries if life come from the mouth—  
Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,  
Draws a deep satisfied breath, 'So—dead at last!'  
Throws down the burthen on dead Pietro's knees."

Guido maintains before the Court that he approached the actual deed of murder with feelings of remorse, and that he struggled hard against what he felt to be a Heaven-directed duty. He thus describes the miserable



99.—THE PRETURA AT CASTELNUOVO.  
Where Pompilia and Caponsacchi were imprisoned



## Guido

days of Christmastide that he spent in the empty house  
in his brother's vineyard:

“ I was in Rome on Christmas Eve.  
Festive bells—everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,  
Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man!  
I am baptised. I started and let drop  
The dagger. 'Where is it, His promised peace?'  
Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray  
To enter into no temptation more.  
I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,  
Deserted—let the ghost of social joy  
Mock and make mouths at me from empty room  
And idle door that missed the master's step—  
Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,  
As my own people watched without a word,  
Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth  
Black like all else, that nod so slow to come—  
I stopped my ears even to the inner call  
Of the dread duty, heard only the song  
'Peace upon earth,' saw nothing but the face  
O' the Holy Infant, and the halo there  
Able to cover yet another face  
Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.  
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:  
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,  
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,  
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared.”

He tells of his flight with his companions along  
the north road that led to Tuscany, and deploras the  
folly of his omission to secure the necessary permit for  
post-horses. He describes how, at the first inn out of  
Rome, he attempted to rectify this error by bribery and  
bluster:

“ Yet I try the trick,  
Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,  
And say the dead man only was a Jew,  
And for my pains find I am dealing just

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome—  
Just this immaculate official stares,  
Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,  
Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine,  
Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,  
Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road!  
'Where's the Permission?' Where's the wretched rag  
With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police,  
To be had for asking, half an hour ago?  
'Gone? Get another, or no horses hence!'"

And so, as another speaker tells:

"All on foot, desperate through the dark,  
Reeled they like drunkards along open road,  
Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles  
Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,  
Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,  
Into a grange, and, one dead heap, slept there  
Till the pursuers hard upon their trace  
Reached them and took them, red from head to heel,  
And brought them to the prison where they lie."

Count Guido Franceschini is represented in the poem by two speeches, one made in a small chamber that adjoins the Court where

"with a twitchy brow and wincing lip  
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,  
He proffers his defence,"

and the other uttered in his cell, as he sits before his two confessors, shuffling his feet in the fetid straw.

These two monologues provide one of the most remarkable and most subtle delineations of character that any work of imagination has ever set forth. Here is a cold, minute, human dissection. Here is laid bare the mind of a specious villain as he writhes and strains against the steel fetters that bind him to the wall. It

## Guido

is a terrible picture, vivid and masterly, exact in its drawing, brilliant in its colour, horrible in its reality.

Guido in his defence omits no detail, however small, that may influence the Court. He talks rapidly, volubly, and often incoherently. He darts from one point to another as each hopeful idea enters his desperate mind. He is a wild beast at bay, searching for any gap—mere chink though it be—in the cordon that hems him in.

He is at one time fierce and defiant, quick to seize any flaw in the indictment, ingenious in excuse, indignant with his accusers and aggressive in the assertion of his righteousness. At another moment he is meek and cringing. He has been misunderstood, has been treated ill, is an object for pity and kindness. He humbles himself to the earth, like a chidden dog at the feet of his master. He is in a state of deep abasement, is a patient, suffering man who only wishes well to all the world and has ever been anxious to do the right. He even makes some pitiable fun of his abject position.

In another sudden mood he is bitter and sarcastic, boastful and truculent. He no longer pleads, he insists. He essays to be dignified and self-confident, but his white lips and haggard eyes belie him. He grasps the bar at which he stands as if the hand-worn wood were solid truth. He emphasises his claim with clenched fist and bellowing voice.

Once more his utterance sinks to a whisper. He maintains his innocence in canting, sobbing phrases. He claims "to stand one white integrity from head to heel," "God shall not lose a life may do Him further

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

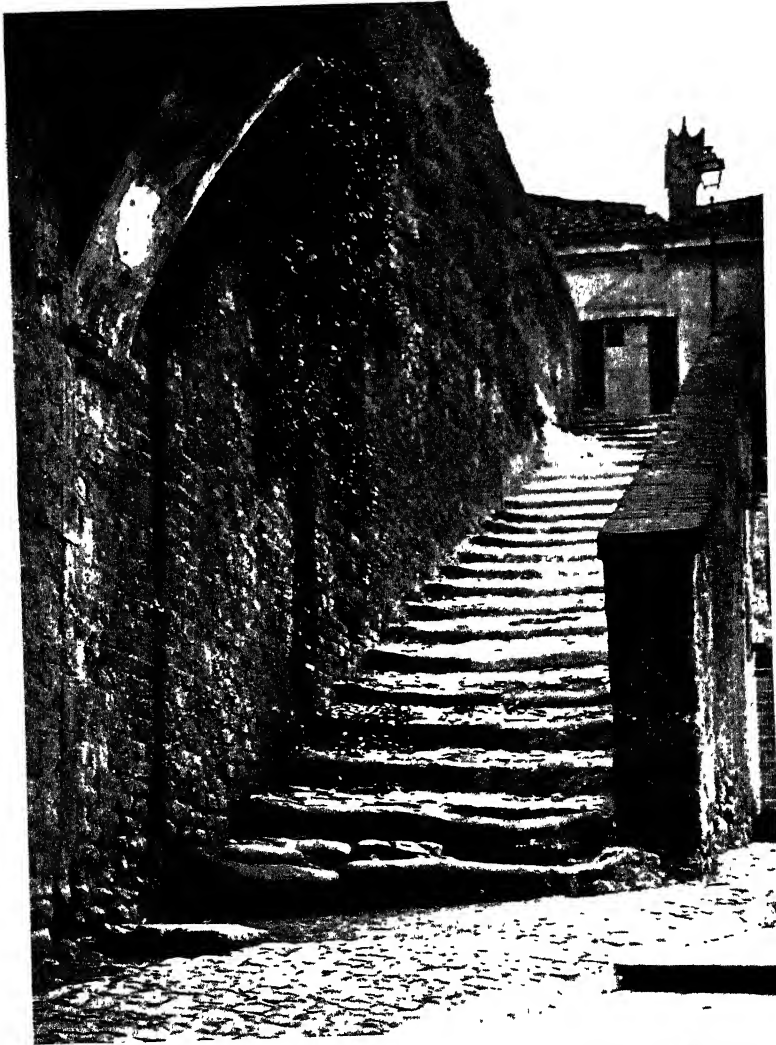
service," says the stammering hypocrite, while the tears run down his cheek. He appeals with fawning confidence to the law, to the kindly judge, of whose right-doing he is assured, and finally begs for mercy for the sake of his aged mother and his new-born baby boy.

In his second monologue, in his half-crazy utterances made just before he was led away to execution, Count Guido shows other phases of his character. He speaks to the two priests who have come to receive his confession, Cardinal Acciaiuoli and Abate Panciatichi, both men from his own country of Tuscany. He talks to them in feverish haste and with reckless impetuosity. He treats the possibility of his execution as a cruel jest, a vile experiment. Turning to the Cardinal he reminds him that the Franceschini family is of as old a lineage as the Acciaiuoli. "My blood," he says,

"Comes from as far a source: ought it to end  
This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks  
Into Rome's sink, where her red refuse runs?"

He implores his fellow-countrymen to help him. Why should he—a man as innocent as the Pope—be put to death? "Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing." Death fills him with horror. He saw the scaffold once, and it sickened him. Why take a harmless human life, when the gospel of Christ is pure love? Confess? He has nothing to confess. Repent? Will repentance save his life?

He jabbars on, he wanders, he talks in stumbling haste. "Talk I must," he says, for he seems to think that by talking he may gain another minute or two of



100 — CASTELNUOVO: THE STEPS BY WHICH POMPILIA  
ASCENDED TO THE PRISON.





## Guido

life. He fumes and curses, breaks out into violent, incoherent speech, reviles the Pope, reviles the religion of Christ, fills the dungeon with shrieks of blasphemy.

He becomes in another moment quiet and plausible, crafty and specious, using many shrewd arguments in his favour, yet at the same time bolting aimlessly to this side and to that, like a maddened rat in a cage.

He traverses the whole story from the beginning to the end, raving like a man in a delirium, now cursing everyone who had come in his path, and now making the cell echo with his hideous laughter.

“Why do I laugh? Why in the very gripe  
O’ the jaws of death’s gigantic skull do I  
Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs?”

He becomes bestial in his ravings, coarse, brutal and savage. He vents much of his wrath upon Violante.

“That mother with her cunning and her cant—  
The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,  
Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness—now,  
The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,  
Now, the prim pursed-up mouth’s protruded lips,  
With deferential duck, slow swing of head,  
Tempting the sudden fist of man too much—  
That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff!”

Pompilia and the priest are “a pair of liars”; yet of Pompilia, he admits, “there was no touch of hate in her,” while in a softer mood he pleads on his behalf that she forgave him all before she died, she

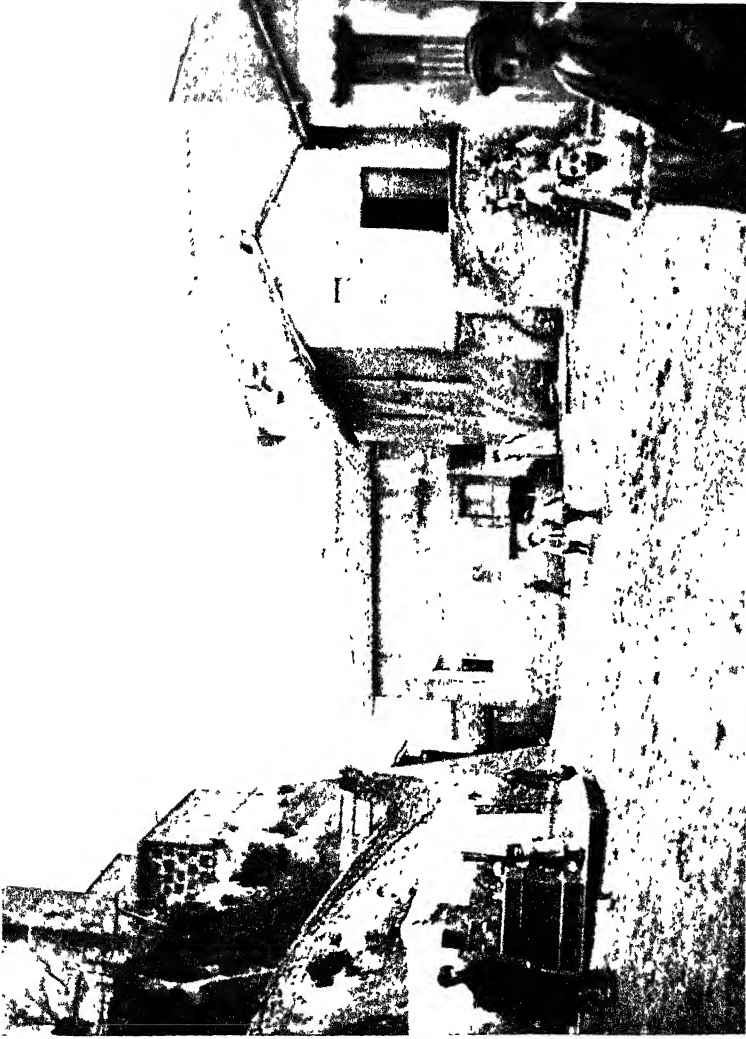
“One ghost-thing, half on earth,  
Half out of it—as if she held God’s hand  
While she leant back and looked her last at me,  
Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep),  
Oh, from her very soul, commending mine  
To heavenly mercies which are infinite.”

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

As he becomes calmer he grovels at the feet of his confessors, prays to them and sets forth with wonderful ingenuity various grounds which may even yet afford excuse for setting him free.

The interview closes with most dramatic vividness. Guido hears on the stairs the steps of the Brotherhood of Death, as they slowly approach the cell, chanting aloud the penitential psalm, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." He springs to his feet and exclaims:

"Who are these you have let descend my stair?  
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!  
Is it 'Open' they dare bid you? Treachery!  
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while  
Out of the world of words I had to say?  
Not one word! all was folly—I laughed and mocked!  
Sirs, my first true word all truth and no lie,  
Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!  
I was just stark mad—let the madman live  
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!  
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,  
I am the Granduke's—no, I am the Pope's!  
Abate—Cardinal—Christ—Maria—God . . .  
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"



101.—THE PIAZZA GARIBALDI, CASTELNUOVO.  
At the Back of the Pretura.



## VI. THE PLEADERS

THE two leading advocates in the murder trial, Arcangeli and Bottini, are not, as Browning presents them, men of vivid personality, nor do their pleadings add either life to the story or poetry to the verse. Arcangeli, the counsel for the defence, speaks first. He is represented as a

“jolly learned man of middle age,  
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,”

who

“Wheezes out law and whiffles Latin forth.”

He takes little real interest in the case. He is more concerned with his son Giacinto, who is just eight years old, whose birthday he is celebrating, and for whom he is planning a great, if vulgar, feast. The points that he emphasises in his memorial of defence are those that have been already indicated in the account furnished from the Yellow Book (p. 80). He naturally lays most stress upon the question

“Who is it dares impugn the natural law?  
Deny God’s word ‘the faithless wife shall die’?”

Pompilia he represents as exhibiting

“a volubility of curse,  
A conversancy in the skill of tooth  
And claw to make suspicion seem absurd.”

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

As to the love-letters, he is convinced that she wrote them, and that she was "as able to write as ready to sin." Moreover, she dosed her husband with poison in order to cover her escape from Arezzo, and thus it was that

"One merry April morning, Guido woke  
After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday,  
With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,  
Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue  
And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy milk."

As for Caponsacchi, he asks what right had he to run away with the countess.

"Pray, in what rubric of the breviary  
Do you find it registered the part of a priest  
That to right wrongs he skip from the church-door,  
Go journeying with a woman that's a wife?"

What possible defence could explain the discovery made at Castelnovo, where, when Guido arrived in hot haste,

"in the inn-yard, bold as 'twere Troy-town,  
There strutted Paris in correct costume.  
Pompilia soon looked Helen to the life  
Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,  
One couch in one room and one room for both?"

Guido, on the other hand, was "a sustainer of society," for he exercised no more than a husband's right "to save his honour which is more than life"; while the wretched clodhoppers from Vitiano, who were ready to murder women for a few scudi apiece, were no other than "four courageous, conscientious friends." It was the news that Pompilia had a child,



102.—THE BACK OF THE PRETURA, CASTELNUOVO,  
Showing the windows of the prison in which Pompilia was  
confined.





## The Pleadings

his son and heir, that finally drove Guido to frenzy,  
for it was then that

"the overburdened mind  
Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze."

Arcangeli's speech throughout is tedious, frivolous and largely beside the mark. It is inflated with flatulent conceit, with extraneous detail and fanciful imaginings. He plays pitch and toss with quotations in Latin, and fills his memorial with a chaotic jumble of legal references and citations. It is no argued defence of the prisoners, but merely a pretentious collection of forensic quibblings, babbled forth by a man of little mind and less understanding.

It is obvious enough that Arcangeli is made but a puppet champion of Guido's claims in order to bring into strong relief that powerful, masterly, wide-minded judgment of the Pope, which follows upon the advocate's pleadings.

For a like reason, with a like purpose, to make prominent by contrast the Pope's massive and nobly worded indictment of Guido, the speech for the prosecution is presented as the petty, feebly handled effort of an ambitious pettifogger.

Bottini is referred to by an opponent as "a lean-gutted, hectic rascal," while others describe his

"Blue juvenile, pure eye, and pippin cheek,  
And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed  
With sudden age, bright devastated hair,"

and sum up his character as "odds of age joined in him with ends of youth."

Bottini's speech is more finished than that of his

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

colleague, is more pretentious, less disconnected, and, at the same time, more florid and verbose. He embellishes his utterances with many classical quotations, but, at the same time, deals at irrelevant length with trivial details. Like his opponent, he shows no solid interest in the matter in hand. He believes himself to be a great and forcible orator, and takes pleasure in imagining with what dramatic effect he could bring forth this and that point if only his pleading could take the form of a set speech, delivered before an admiring Court. In his prosecution of the prisoners on behalf of the Treasury, he advances no particulars other than those which have been already set out in the account from the Yellow Book (p. 84).

His condemnation of Guido is mild and half-hearted. He flourishes the great sword of the law over the head of the villain count, but the steel is dull and the edge is blunted.

Of Caponsacchi he speaks leniently and with indulgence, as an old man would comment on the doings of a hot-headed youth. He sees in him no hero, no modern-day St. George, for he goes little beyond allowing that he did his best according to his lights.

His defence of Pompilia is a mere apologia. He excuses her with ineffectual effort, pities her with vapid flabbiness, slobbers over her troubles and leaves the vindication of her honour and the cherishing of her good name to stronger and unknown hands.

His monologue, indeed, forms a fitting prelude—fitting in its irritating feebleness—to the real speech of the prosecution, which comes from the lips of the aged prelate in the Vatican.

## VII. THE POPE

THE Pope, an old man over eighty years of age, is represented as

“sitting out the dim  
Droop of a sombre February day  
In the plain closet where he does such work,  
With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,  
One table and one lathen crucifix,”

poring over what he terms “The dismallest of documents.”

His speech is solemn, dignified and sonorous, the criticism of a great mind and the judgment of a broad intellect. He is relentless and, indeed, terrible in his denunciation of Count Guido, but tender and lovable in his generous appreciation of Pompilia. He recognises the solemnity of his deliberations and reminds himself that the life of a human being hangs upon his decision.

“Once more on this earth of God's,  
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,  
I take His staff with my uncertain hand,  
And stay my six and fourscore years, my due  
Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,  
And forthwith think, speak, act in place of Him—  
The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made  
From man's assize to mine: I sit and see  
Another poor weak trembling human wretch  
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,  
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

From this world to the next—gives way and way,  
Just on the edge over the awful dark :  
With nothing to arrest him but my feet. . . .  
And I am bound, the solitary judge,  
To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,  
And either hold a hand out, or withdraw  
A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall."

He owns that he is not infallible, and recalls more than one occasion in the past when popes had given decisions which, in fullness of time, were proved to be erroneous, and were, indeed, reversed. Here no reversal is possible. Here no amendment can avail. Supposing that he does come to a wrong conclusion, how would he defend himself?

"What other should I say than 'God so willed :  
Mankind is ignorant, a man am I :  
Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin !'  
So and not otherwise, in after-time,  
If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound  
This multifarious mass of words and deeds  
Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,  
I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.  
'God who set me to judge thee, meted out  
So much of judging faculty, no more :  
Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof.'"

He wonders if he, as a man of the world, will ever question his decision as the head of the Church.

"Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou  
My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long  
But studied God and man, the many years  
I' the school, i' the cloister, in the diocese—  
Thou, not Pope, but the mere old man o' the world  
Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,  
Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust,  
Question the after-me, this self now Pope,  
Hear his procedure, criticise his work?"



103.—THE ROMAN CAMPAGNA, FROM THE HIGH ROAD NEAR BORGHETTACCIO.



## The Pope

He proceeds to go through the whole of the story, from the beginning to the end, making wise comments as each phase unfolds itself.

For what he did Guido had assuredly not his circumstances to blame, for he began life with more than normal advantages.

“Fortified by propitious circumstance,  
Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for guide,”

and guarded from the arch tempter by diligent culture and choice companionship, he yet proved himself to be a man of low instinct and base pretension.

With regard to his fatal marriage and the object of that marriage, the Pope speaks as follows:

“He purposes this marriage, I remark,  
On no one motive that should prompt thereto—  
Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged  
Appropriate to the action ; so they were :  
The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took.  
Not one permissible impulse moves the man,  
From the mere liking of the eye and ear,  
To the true longing of the heart that loves,  
No trace of these : but all to instigate,  
Is what sinks man past level of the brute,  
Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.  
All is lust for money : to get gold—  
Why, lie, rob, if it must be murder ! Make  
Body and soul wring gold out, lured within  
The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence !”

The revelation of Pompilia's birth brings Guido's carefully laid scheme to nought. He then determines to wreak his malice on the parents by punishing the innocent child and at the same time advance his unabated greed. With this purpose always in his mind, he cultivates



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

"the fine  
Felicity and flower of wickedness ;  
Determines by the utmost exercise  
Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,  
To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang  
From the parents, else would triumph out of reach,  
By punishing their child, within reach yet,  
Who nowise could have wronged, thought, word or deed,  
I' the matter that now moves him. So plans he,  
Always subordinating (note the point !)  
Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest,  
The meaner."

He hopes to goad Pompilia to despair, to suicide, or at least to flight, with no other result than this : "She lay resigned to die—so far the simple cruelty was foiled."

He then endeavours to entrap her in a love affair, and sets the trap with consummate cunning. Hence come the maze of lies, the forged letters, the spying and watching of the maid,

"Whereby the man so far attains his end  
That strange temptation is permitted—see !  
Pompilia, wife, and Caponsacchi, priest,  
Are brought together as nor priest nor wife  
Should stand, and there is passion in the place,  
Power in the air for evil as for good,  
Promptings, from heaven and hell, as if the stars  
Fought in their courses for a fate to be.  
Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,  
I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.  
No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,  
No tablet signalise the terrace, teach  
New generations which succeed the old  
The pavement of the street is holy ground ;  
No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed  
And Satan fell like lightning !"

This second plot failed utterly by God's gift to

## The Pope

Pompilia of a purity of soul that would not take pollution.

Once more Guido schemes in the solitude of his palace in Arezzo, schemes to satisfy his greed and to crush the hated family, root and branch. The signal for this outbreak of malice, for this more finished display of craft, was the birth of his child—a noble moment! He will sweep all three from the earth, but will save the child, who must in the end inherit all that the three possessed.

So far with the story. The Pope now proceeds to pass judgment upon those who have played their parts in the tragedy. He deals first with Count Guido Franceschini.

“Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black  
Discernible in this group of clustered crimes  
Huddling together in the cave they call  
Their palace, outraged day thus penetrates.  
Around him ranged, now close and now remote,  
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs  
O’ the mage and master, I detect each heap  
Subsidiary i’ the scene nor loathed the less,  
All alike coloured, all descried akin  
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred  
At the centre: see, they lick the master’s hand—  
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute  
The Abate—why, mere wolfishness looks well,  
Guido stands honest in the red o’ the flame,  
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,  
This Guido, all craft but no violence,  
This copier of the mien and gait and garb  
Of Peter and Paul that he may go disguised,  
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i’ the temple-porch,  
Armed with religion, fortified by law,  
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp,  
And turns the classic page—and all for craft,

## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch !  
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,  
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap  
He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge ;  
Paul is past reach in this world and my time :  
That is a case reserved."

Having disposed of the other Franceschini, of the  
Bishop of Arezzo and of the Governor of that town,  
the Pope turns with loving gesture to Pompilia :

"First of the first,  
Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now  
Perfect in whiteness—stoop thou down, my child,  
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope  
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame . . .

Everywhere  
I see in the world the intellect of man,  
That sword, the energy his subtle spear,  
The knowledge which defends him like a shield—  
Everywhere ; but they make not up, I think,  
The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower  
She holds up to the softened gaze of God !"

He praises her purity, her patience, the firmness of  
her faith, and the nobleness with which she ever re-  
turned right for wrong and pardon for injury. He  
then continues :

"My flower,  
My rose, I gather for the breast of God,  
This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,  
That having been obedient to the end  
According to the light allotted, law  
Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test—  
Dutiful to the foolish parents first,  
Submissive next to the bad husband—nay,  
Tolerant of those meaner miserable  
That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain—  
Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law



104. -THE BRIDGE BETWEEN PRIMA PORTA AND ROME.  
Crossed by the Old Road, now Disused.



## The Country of "The Ring and the Book"

Conciliating earth with all that cloud,  
Thank heaven as I do! Ay, such championship  
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud  
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly  
The challenge of the false knight—watch we long,  
And wait we vainly for its gallant like  
From those appointed to the service, sworn  
His body-guard with pay and privilege . . .

In thought, word and deed,

How throughout all the warfare thou wast pure,  
I find it easy to believe: and if  
At any fateful moment of the strange  
Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,  
Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much—  
As when a thunderous midnight, with black air  
That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell,  
Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed  
Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides  
Immensity of sweetness, so, perchance,  
Might the surprise and fear release too much  
The perfect beauty of the body and soul  
Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,  
He who is Pity: was the trial sore?  
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!  
Why comes temptation but for man to meet  
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,  
And so be pedestalled in triumph? . . .  
Be glad thou has let light into the world,  
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary—see  
The same upon thy path and march assured,  
Learning anew the use of soldiership,  
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,  
Loyalty to the life's end!"

After he has disposed of the sordid, hideous, yet beautiful story, the Pope begins to meditate aloud, as old men will. He considers the mind of man, or rather that more universal mind which, proceeding from the Supreme Being, dominates and embraces all

## The Pope

things that live. He speaks of human perfection and asks

“What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God  
But just the instance which this tale supplies  
Of love without a limit?”

and explains that it is in its self-sacrifice that love becomes unlimited.

All the events that he has talked about tend, he thinks, in some unseen way to good, for life is but “a training and a passage” and a place of probation, while the earth is not man’s goal but his starting place.

He becomes a little verbose and tedious and, to some degree, inconsequent, as he drifts into the byways of philosophical disquisition. He hears Euripides tell of the guides that influenced human conduct before the time of Christ. He answers him. He wonders how far the existing laws that at the moment control human conduct are absolute and eternal.

He returns once more to the matter in hand. He discusses the various pleas urged on behalf of the mitigation of Guido’s punishment and repudiates them all. He declines to allow that Guido can claim the benefit of clergy. He throws aside the appeal that is founded upon mere mercy. He ignores the petition for leniency on the ground that his own life is very near its end. He disregards the world’s opinion of his verdict and is indifferent as to the bearing of his decision upon his reputation as a Pope.

His last words are these:

“Enough, for I may die this very night,  
And how should I dare die, this man let live?  
Carry this forthwith to the Governor!”